

INSIDE WRESTLING & THE WRESTLER

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Volume 15, 2007

FEATURES

30 Q & A: LARRY ZBYSZKO

More than 25 years after he bashed Bruno Sammartino from behind with a wooden chair, Larry Zbyszko is as controversial as ever. Zbyszko sounds off in this wideranging 90-minute interview with Editor-in-Chief Harry Burkett. He discusses his relationship with the legendary Sammartino, his days in the NWA and AWA, his role in the "Monday Night War," and his stint as TNA's director of authority. Most importantly, we find out what he and Baby Doll had in that manila envelope!

VINCE McMAHON IS HANDLING ECW JUST RIGHT

A Special Wrestler Analysis

48

52

14

16

18

24

72

74

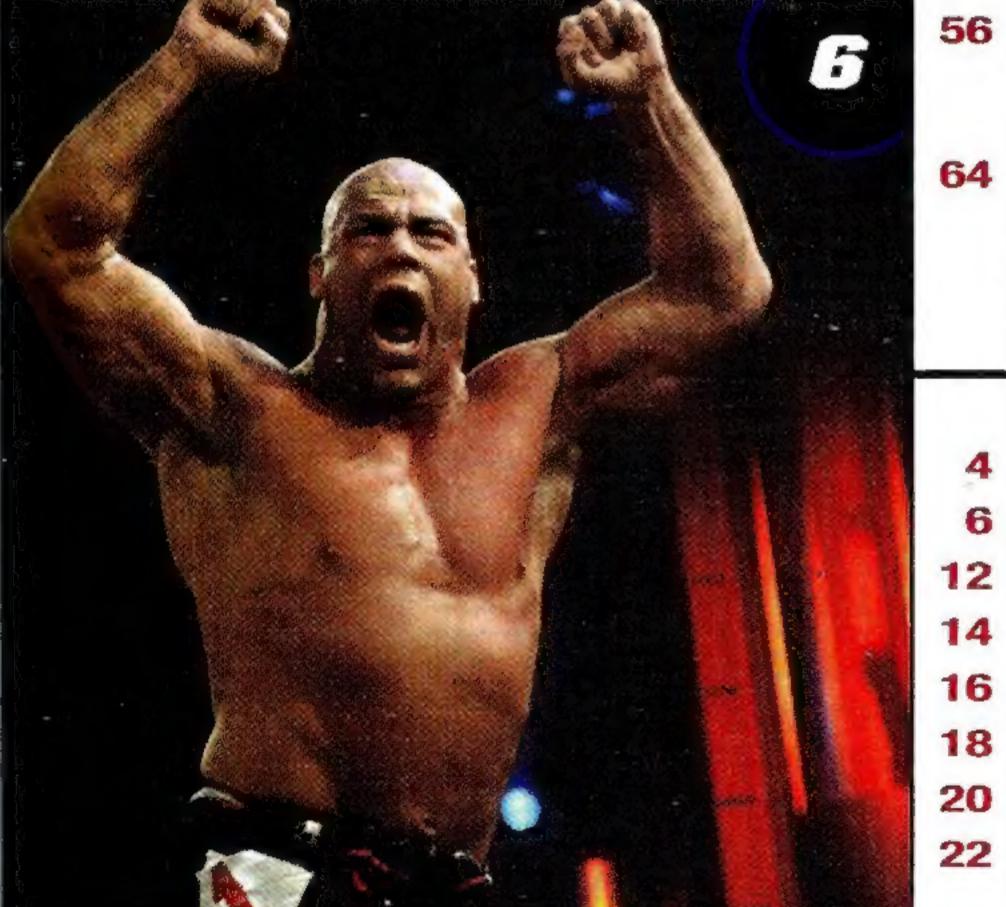
MIKE AWESOME: 1965-2007

"His Last Name Said It All"

WWE OVERHAUL! Our Plan To Reinvigorate The Brand Extension

CARLOS COLON: "Ric Flair Is Right About Carlito!"

DEPARTMENTS



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YOUR LETTERS

WHAT'S HAPPENING by Brady Hicks

KREW-CUTS by Frank Krewda

BLINDSIDED by Harry Burkett THUMBS UP, THUMBS DOWN

POINT/COUNTERPOINT

INTRODUCING ... THORUF MARIUS

FROM BELL TO BELL

by Mike Quackenbush

SPOTLIGHT ON ... SEAN WALTMAN

OFFICIAL WRESTLING RATINGS

WOW! REMEMBER HIM?

Look for the Volume 16, 2007 issue of The WrestLer/Inside Wrestling on sale June 12, 2007

LICH LEUS

CAN'T SEE ENOUGH OF CENA

For all those Cena-haters out there, I have a message for you: John Cena is the classiest Raw World champion in recent memory. Shawn Michaels has given Cena every reason to turn against him, and Cena has simply stared Michaels down and kept his cool. If anything, Michaels—the so-called veteran—has been downright childish in this rivalry.

I don't know what the outcome of their match is going to be at WrestleMania 23, but I hope Cena retains the title. He's the perfect representative for WWE. Whether Cena stars in another movie, cuts another rap album, or just sticks to selling cold-cuts for Subway, he is the wrestler I want to see represent our sport to the general public.

Put me down as a certified "Chain Gang" member!

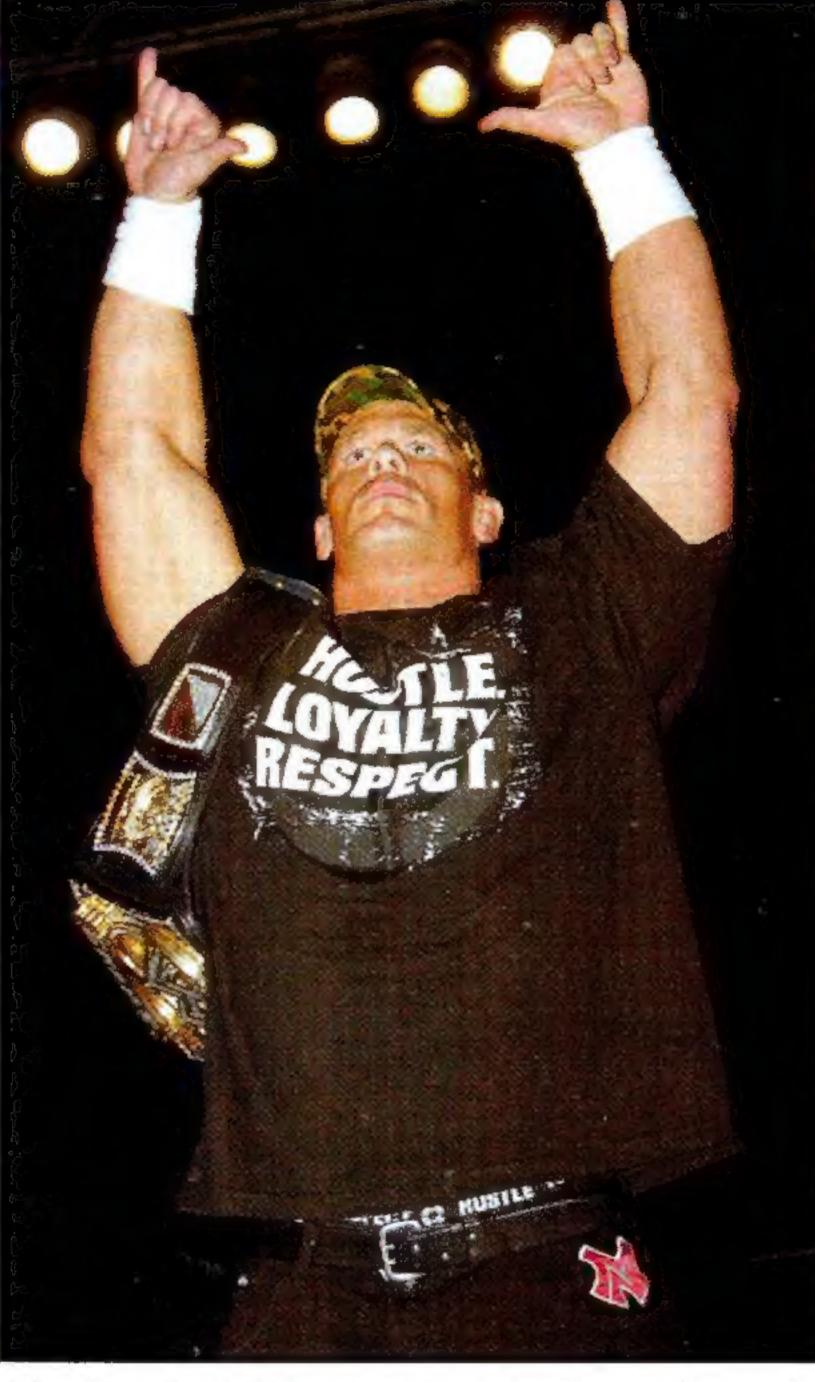
> ROMANA TAMM London, England

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH

In his "No Holds Barred" piece from The Wrestler/Inside Wrestling (Volume 12, 2007), Will Welsh did a great job of detailing

how talented female wrestlers like Victoria have been marginalized and shortchanged by WWE. There's something pathetic about a promotion that uses talented performers like Victoria as jobbers for women whose only reason for being on the roster is their looks. She is one of the best woman wrestlers of her generation.

Victoria should have been at the top with Trish Stratus during the past few years, yet WWE excluded her from WrestleManias 21 and 23 and



John Cena is gaining respect among fans, notes reader Romana Tamm. She thinks Cena measured up to Shawn Michaels during the buildup toward WrestleMania 23. In fact, she says, the "Doctor Of Thuganomics" may be more of a man than the "Heartbreak Kid."

made her wrestle in silly bra-andpanties matches and even a ridiculous mechanical bull-riding competition. It's long overdue for WWE to show her some respect again.

Thanks to Will Welsh for a great piece.

GEORGE PICARDI Boston, MA

YOU GO, GAIL!

Gail Kim is a role model for all of us girls. She is strong, assertive, and determined to take her place among all the wrestlers of TNA, including her male counterparts.

HEATHER CHASE Schaumburg, IL

HANG ON, WSX!

I am a huge indy fan, but I could never find the time or money to go to all the shows I wanted to go to. So I was so excited when I found out that MTV was thinking about televising a new wrestling show. I got so hyped at the thought of seeing Jack Evans, Teddy Hart, and Justin Credible on regular cable-TV! And, by the way, your article on Wrestling Society X (THE WRES-TLER/Inside Wrestling, Volume 13, 2007) was right on target.

But now I am hearing rumors that WSX might not stick around. I am writing to let MTV know that the viewers do want you to keep WSX on the air. So, WSX, don't give up. We are all out here rooting for you!

COLIN BURKE New Albany, IN

PUNK vs. VAN DAM?

After a long wait, I'm glad to see some genuine excitement in ECW. Vince McMahon had a great idea when he instigated the feud between the New Breed and the ECW Originals. Of course, this leaves an odd man out: C.M. Punk.

He doesn't get along with Elijah Burke, Matt Striker, Kevin Thorn, or any of those guys. In fact, he's one of the few non-Originals who is a fan favorite. And, in terms of his ring style and temperament, he

doesn't seem to be a good fit for the Originals.

For the good of his career, and to take ECW to a higher level, Punk should challenge Rob Van Dam. According to your ratings on pwionline.com, Punk and Van Dam have been struggling for the top contender's spot for more than 30 weeks. Why don't they settle the

issue in the ring? That's what competition is all about, right?

Punk vs. RVD would capture the imagination of all wrestling fans—and that's exactly what ECW needs right now.

RICK HALDEMAN Chevy Chase, MD

LAY OFF "EASY-E"!

Eric Bischoff doesn't get more respect in the wrestling business. Give the guy a break! People are always knocking him! Remember the NWO? It was cool! And, if it weren't for Bischoff, there would have never been a "Monday Night War"!

ARNIE LANCASTER South Wayne, WI

A.J.'s NEW STYLE

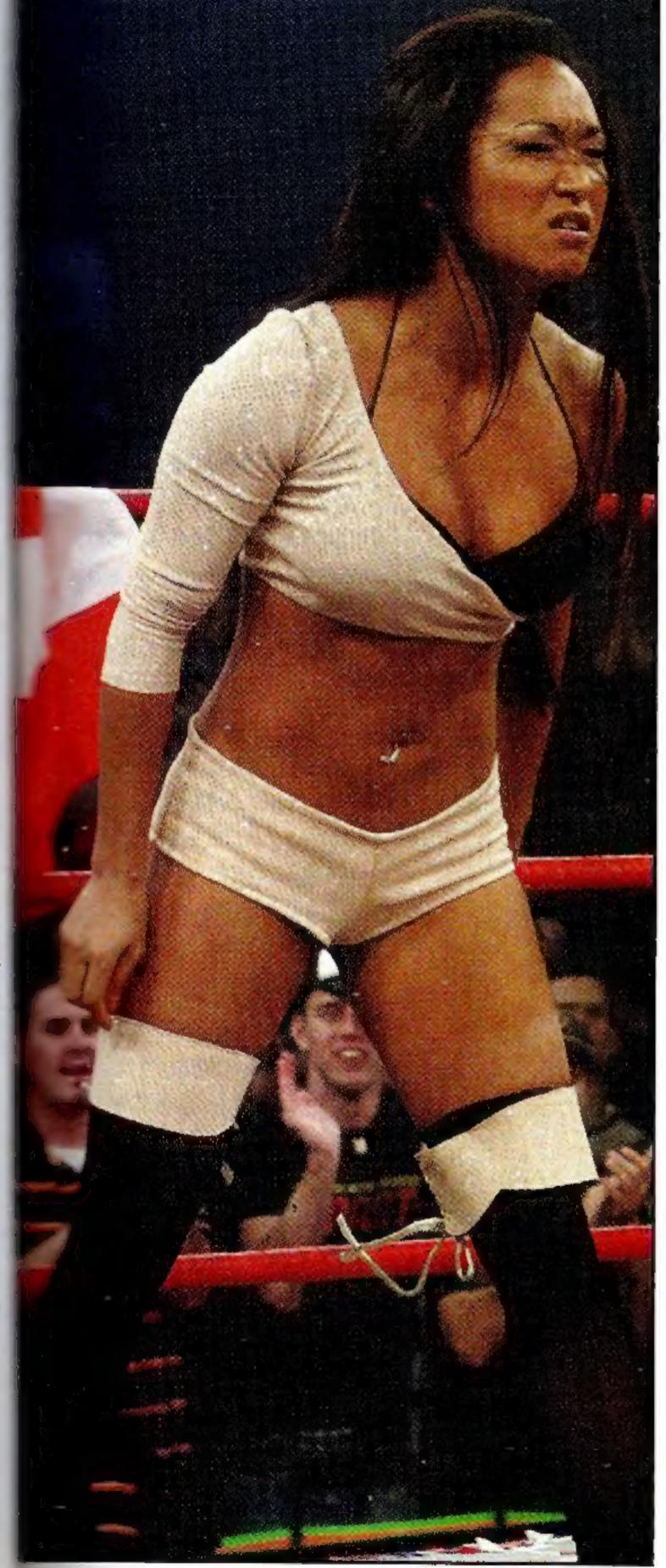
If I had to watch any more TNA with A.J. Styles' squeakyclean image, I would have given up on TNA altogether. Thankfully, A.J. made a wise decision and turned heel. He tried this once before, but it wasn't convincing. It's funny, but I think the reason this persona is working now is because he has changed more than just his attitude. Sure, he changed out of the shorts, but it also looks like he is growing some stubble and even some chest hair! It's as if this heel change is more natural and shows more of the real A.J. And to think all it took was to toss out his razor!

Maybe the other guys will take a hint from A.J. and we'll start seeing some of the old-school, all-natural look again! I think he's really on to something!

> ALLISON ZAYON Fort Lauderdale, FL

Send YOUR LETTERS to: Box 1148 Fort Washington, PA 19034

Or e-mail letters to: wrestlermag@yahoo.com



Gail Kim is not your typical TNA Knockout. Reader Heather Chase is proud to pledge her allegiance to a strong-willed female competitor such as Gail. Perhaps TNA will establish a women's championship in the near future.

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The Wrestler 5

what's happening?

By Brady Hicks

he wrestling world is mourning the loss of another top star way too early. The body of 42-year-old Michael Alfonso—who was better known to fans as Mike Awesome—was discovered by friends in his Tampa, Florida, home. It appears the former ECW World champion committed suicide by hanging himself.

Awesome's career began in 1989 and took him around the globe, where he gained worldwide recognition competing for Frontier Martial Arts Wrestling (FMW) as well as the original ECW, WCW, WWE, and—briefly—TNA. In the U.S., Awesome is probably best known for having left ECW as the company's champion to compete in WCW in 2000. Amid threats from Paul Heyman and ECW's legal department, an agreement was soon reached for Awesome (by then a WCW-contracted wrestler) and Tazz (a WWE-contracted wrestler) to battle for the ECW World title, a match won by Tazz. In a 2003 interview, Awesome would later dispute claims he was

unfair to ECW, citing that during his entire championship reign he was never contracted to the company. Awesome's last high-profile match occurred at the 2005 ECW One Night Stand show, where he pinned longtime rival Masato Tanaka. We at London Publishing send our condolences to all of Alfonso's family and friends during this difficult time.

Not many people know that Awesome's aunt is actually the wife of **Hulk Hogan**'s brother. And Hogan himself has also been in the news. It was originally believed that

Hogan was to have appeared at Wrest-leMania 23—until he had a falling-out with WWE Chairman Vince Mc-Mahon.

It was widely reported that Hogan infuriated the senior McMahon when while sitting in as a guest of Bubba the Love Sponge's radio program—he took a call on his cell phone from Ann Russo, the secretary for John Laurinaitis, WWE's vice president of talent relations. Russo, not aware that Hogan had put her on speakerphone, proceeded to inadvertently leak several names being considered for entry into the WWE Hall of Fame. Hogan, by the way, gave a ringing endorse-



Much of Michael Alfonso's (a.k.a. Mike Awesome) fame came when he left ECW while still carrying the ECW World belt, which he held on to until legal threats by Paul Heyman persuaded Awesome to drop it to Tazz (right). Sadly, Awesome made headlines again on February 17 when he was found dead inside his Tampa, Florida, home.

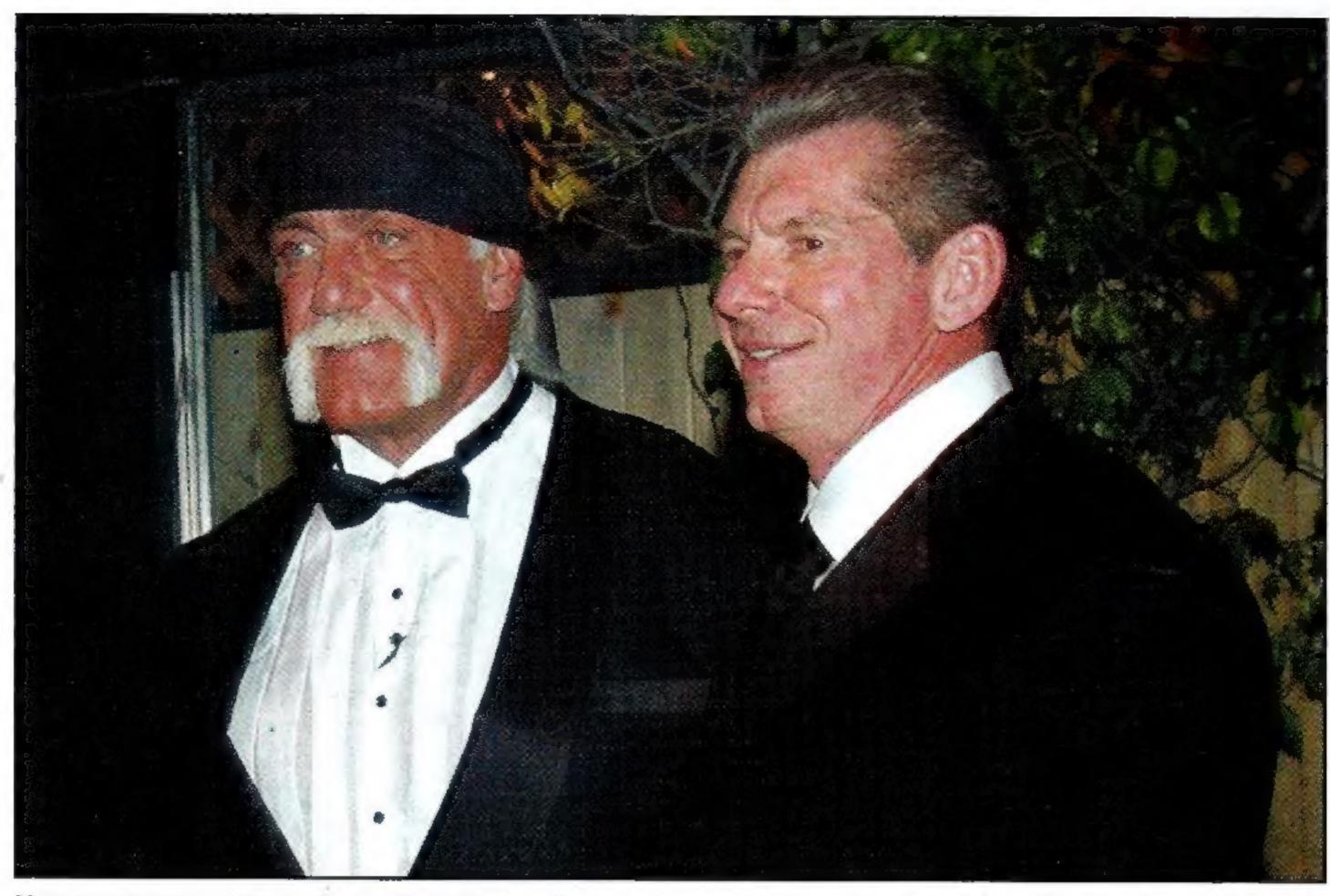
ment to The Big Bossman, Curtis laukea, Dusty Rhodes, Randy Savage, The Von Erichs, Rick Rude, The Bushwackers, and Howard Finkel.

In the aftermath of this apparent Hogan-McMahon fallout, a more amusing character has surfaced on Smackdown. WWE Diva Jillian Hall appears more concerned with getting a tryout on American Idol and gaining a reputation as a singer and dancer than she is with wrestling her fellow female competitors on the blue brand. Although she was quick to believed that Hall's new

character is a jab at Hogan and his daughter, **Brooke**, who is still trying to make a big break into the music business.

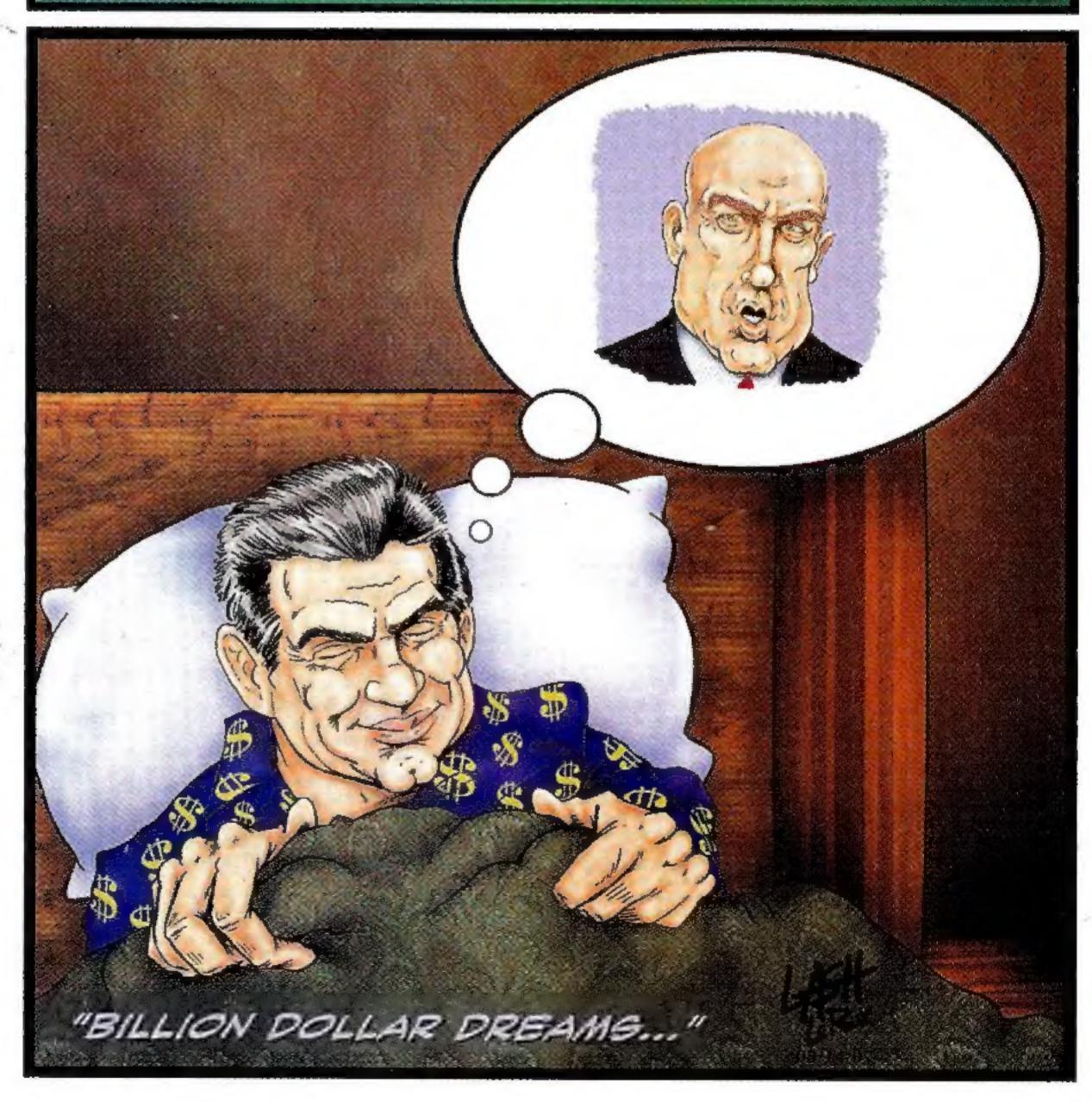
And the insults continue. In the April 2007 edition of Men's Fitness, former multiple-time WWE world champion and current TNA star Kurt Angle launched a tirade against Smackdown titleholder Batista. Said Angle in the interview, "A guy like Batista can't walk and chew gum at the same time. He prefers wrestling with smaller guys than jacked-up guys who 'look' good to the crowd, but doesn't know what he's doing." Ouch. It should be noted that Batista also became embroiled in a war of words with TNA wrestler A.J. Styles in 2006 after commenting on Styles' wrestling style. Batista has not responded to Angle's comments as of press time.

Speaking of TNA, it is being reported that the company will soon lose the right to use the NWA-named titles on its programming. Reports indicate that the company will soon be forced to create its own singles and tag team championship belts. In the most likely scenario, one of the next TNA

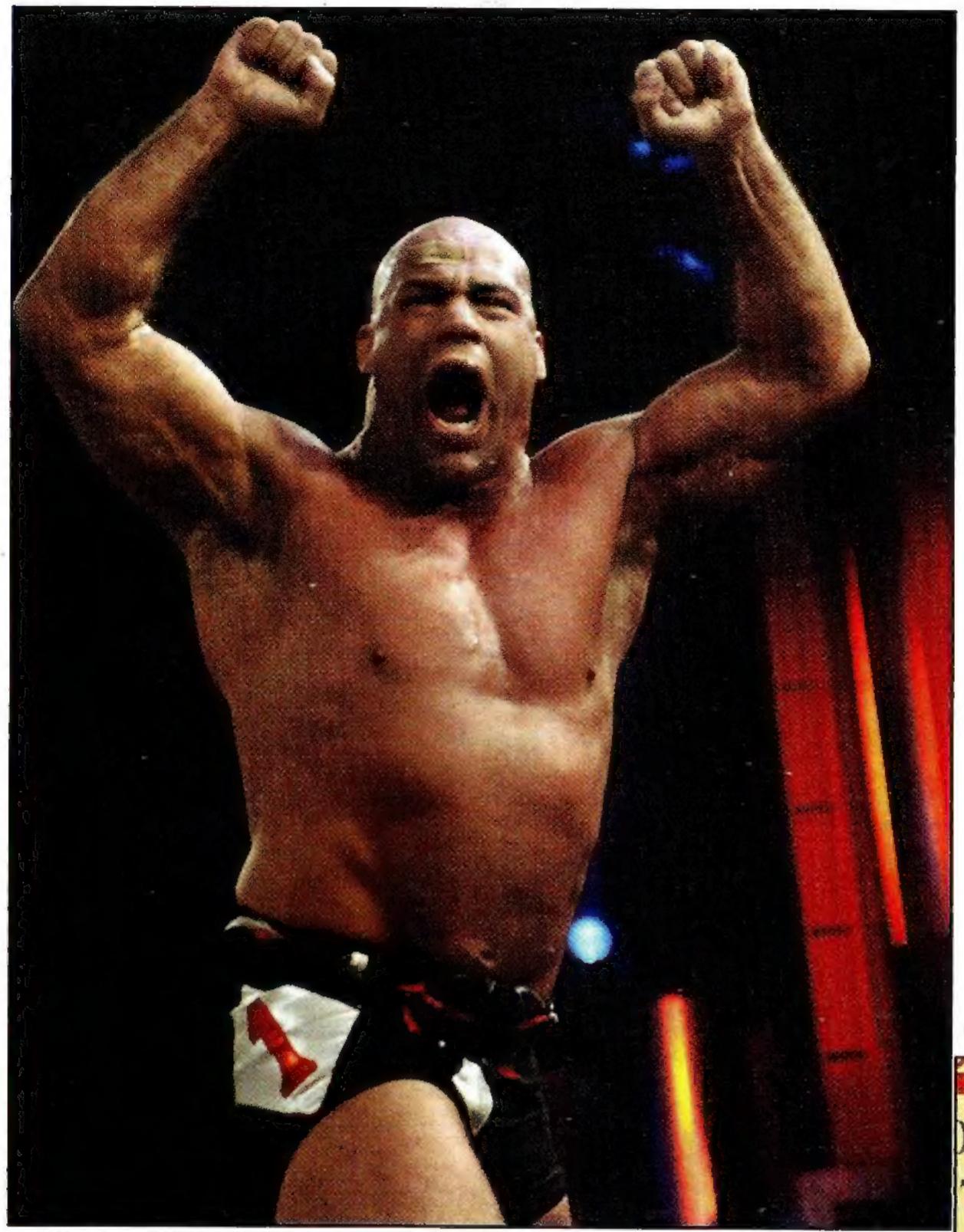


though she was quick to deny the rumors, it is

% LASH LEROUX



The Wrestler 7



There's nothing like burning bridges, and Kurt Angle has become somewhat of an expert on the subject. First, Angle angered Vince McMahon following his August release, and then he questioned the ability of current Smackdown World champion Batista in the April 2007 edition of *Men's Fitness*. Angle must really like the weather in Orlando.

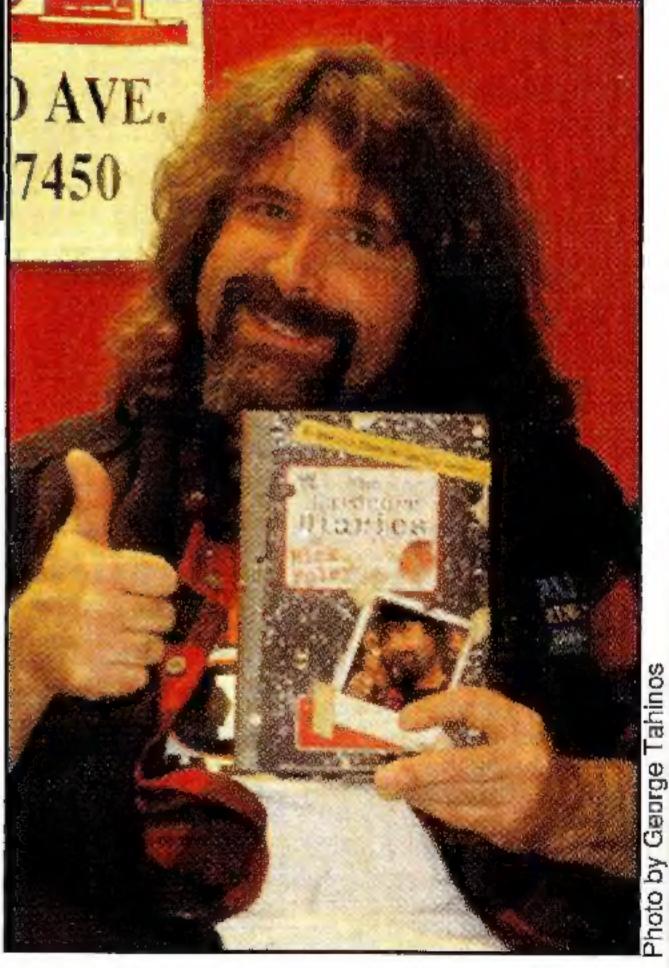
wrestlers to win the NWA World title could possibly renounce his claim to the NWA lineage in favor of the new "TNA World" title, much like Shane Douglas did for ECW back in 1994. And don't be surprised if the new revolutionary turns out to be Samoa Joe.

Controversy has also seemingly led to the removal of another
former star from WWE's WrestleMania plans. In his third autobiography, Hardcore Diaries, Mick
Foley calls into question many of
the moves that WWE executives
have made in recent years,
notably some of the creative deci-

sions rendered by Vince McMahon and his creative staff. Despite WWE's public endorsement of the book, it is believed that Foley's recount of his most recent comeback has annoyed many in Creative, reportedly causing few to push for his name to be involved in the annual event. Despite this, Foley was still rehired by McMahon on a recent edition of Raw after leading the chairman to believe he would be the special guest referee for Umaga (with McMahon) vs. Bobby Lashley (with Donald Trump) at WrestleMania.

Meanwhile, fledgling promotion seems poised to close its doors permanently. MTV recently announced it was canceling Wrestling Society X after airing only four episodes. Reports have linked this cancellation to everything from sluggish ratings to graphic content in a fireball incident involving Vampiro and Ricky Banderas. Big Vision Entertainment, which produced the show, will retain the rights to WSX and can market it to other networks or direct to DVD if it chooses to do so.

Finally, a new tag team championship seems to be planned for ECW. Although details are sketchy, WWE officials have decided to establish a tag title to highlight more of ECW's mid-card talent on a week-by-week basis. Many in the industry hope the title represents one more step toward solidifying ECW as more than Vince Mc-Mahon's pet project. It remains to be seen, however, so keep alert. You never know what turn the wrestling world will take next.



Lucky for Mick Foley, the McMahons don't seem to mind Foley revealing not-so-flattering details of WWE in his latest autobiography, *Hardcore Diaries*, but other members of the company seem to think differently, and made strong efforts to leave Foley out of WM23.

TEMERIES.

With Frank Krewda

S I SAT down to formulate a topic for this installment of "Krew-Cuts," it suddenly dawned on me that I have contributed to The Wrestler and its sister publications, either as an associate editor or senior writer, for a decade. That put me in a reflective mood, and I began to realize how quickly the wrestling business can change in only 10 years. I found that my most vivid memories could be grouped into what I call "The Good, The Bad, And The Funny Of Professional Wrestling: 1997–2007."

THE GOOD

These events weren't necessarily good for the industry, but if, after all this time, they remain emblazoned in my memory, they must have been noteworthy:

1. Bill Goldberg defeats Hulk Hogan for the WCW World title

The buzz in the Georgia Dome was tangible that night and it came right through the television. WCW didn't do much right, but give the promotion credit—they recognized that Goldberg couldn't be denied any longer and gave him the title shot at the right time.

2. Mick Foley sets a new standard for self-flagellation at "Hell In A Cell"

The image of Foley plummeting from the top of a steel cage, then collapsing through the cage's ceiling onto a mat full of thumbtacks, then crawling off a stretcher to finish his match with The Undertaker was as jaw-dropping as professional wrestling gets.

3. Eddie Guerrero wins the Smackdown World title

Everybody's favorite hard-luck kid upsets the bigger, stronger Brock Lesnar to capture his first world title. It was a feel-good sentiment that stands the test of time.

4. Tommy Dreamer wins the ECW World title

The corner of Ritner and Swanson was charged with the feeling that something special was going to happen on April 22, 2000. And Paul

Heyman delivered by having hardcore icon Tommy Dreamer compete for the ECW World title. The outcome was so satisfying that one ringside photographer cried when Dreamer's hand was raised in victory.

5. Bam Bam Bigelow and Taz crash through the ring at Living Dangerously

This grudge match for the ECW TV title raged back and forth and up and down until Taz finally clamped on the Taz-mission. Instead of submitting, Bigelow pitched his weight forward in an attempt to escape ... and down came the ring, wrestlers and all. It was the perfect ending to an exciting night of scintillating wrestling.



The ECW faithful remember the sentimental moment Tommy Dreamer won his long-desired ECW World title. Frank Krewda remembers one photographer being moved to tears.

THE BAD

These events were bad for the industry, and, depending on your perspective, showed professional wrestling at its most embarrassing worst:

1. David Arquette wins the WCW World title

This was the consummate slap in the face of any wrestler who gave an honest effort at mastering his craft. What does it say about the caliber of talent when a skinny, disrespectful, and marginally talented comedian can rise above Hogan, Flair, Hart, Sting, Nash, and company? Kudos to Bret Hart for voicing his disgust in his Calgary Sun column.

2. Owen Hart plummets to his death

This was a no-win situation for McMahon and WWE. What was Owen doing up there anyway? And how could Vince let the pay-per-view go on? Vince tried to do the classy thing by dedicating the subsequent episode of Raw to Owen's life and career. But the die had already been cast. The need for pro wrestlers to constantly up the ante had reached a dangerous point.

3. Mike Awesome goes to WCW

Mike Awesome's decision to sign with WCW while still holding the ECW World title was a crushing blow to the extreme promotion. Awesome epitomized the selfless work ethic that defined the organization, and he had the full support of the rabid and savvy ECW fans. It's hard to criticize Mike for preferring more money and a less demanding ring style, but the timing made it especially disappointing.

4. Butterbean kayos Bart Gunn

"Brawl For All," the WWF's ill-fated shootfight concept, was a bad idea. Wrestlers like Steve Williams, who'd spent their entire careers building badass reps, saw it all come crashing down in a boxing match. Bart Gunn turned heads throughout this tournament, but he nearly lost his when he met Butterbean, a marginal boxer who had become known as "King Of The Four-Rounders." Any way you slice it, pro wrestlers came out looking inferior to pro boxers.

5. Vince freaks out on Bob Costas

Another one of those can't-win deals for WWE and professional wrestling. Vince, alternating between WWE chairman and his "Mr. McMahon" character, came off as defensive and unhinged as he bullied the smaller and embarrassed Costas on his HBO special.

THE FUNNY

I may have a warped sense of humor. But to me, these moments are the essence of sports-entertainment.

1. Steve Austin attacks Vince in the hospital

Slapping Vince with a bedpan was funny. The coup de grâce? Zapping VKM with the defibrillator paddles. Hilarious.

2. Coach gets steppin' in Charleston

Smackdown was in Charleston, South Carolina, one might when a newly hired Jonathan Coachman attempted interview The Rock backstage. After delivering a series of mild insults, Rock finally ordered Coach to do the



The most embarrassing moment in wrestling history is undoubtedly actor/comedian David Arquette's success in WCW. His title win prompted criticism from serious pro wrestlers around the world.

Charleston dance right then and there. I still don't what made me laugh more—the sight of Coachman doing the dance or the unmitigated glee with which he did it.

3. Jeff Jarrett attacks Mae Young on Raw

Jarrett had recently taken to smashing opponents with a powder-filled guitar during and after his matches. For whatever reason, Mae Young and Moolah showed up in the ring after a Jarrett match. "He isn't ... he isn't ... he smash!!! He did." Going upside a septuagenarian's head with a guitar still makes me laugh.

4. Vince McMahon pees his pants on Raw

Vince's performance as "Stone-Cold's" victim was Oscar-worthy. The facial expressions were priceless. WWE caught a fair amount of static about the overtones of workplace violence. But I, for one, saw nothing but humor in Vince wetting himself as Austin held a toy gun to his head.

5. Kane sets J.R. on fire

This angle was so over the top that all I could do was laugh at it. The very idea that a wrestler would fry a senior exec of his company during an interview, then be allowed to stay on with the company, and that the exec would shill for that wrestler as if nothing happened just tickles me.

bingsig

By Harry Burkett

deal. Some of you may know him better as Bad News Allen, the wrestling name he used for most of his 21-year career. Or you may know him as Bad News Brown, the name he used in the WWF. By whatever name, the fact is the same: Allen Coage was one of the toughest men on the planet.

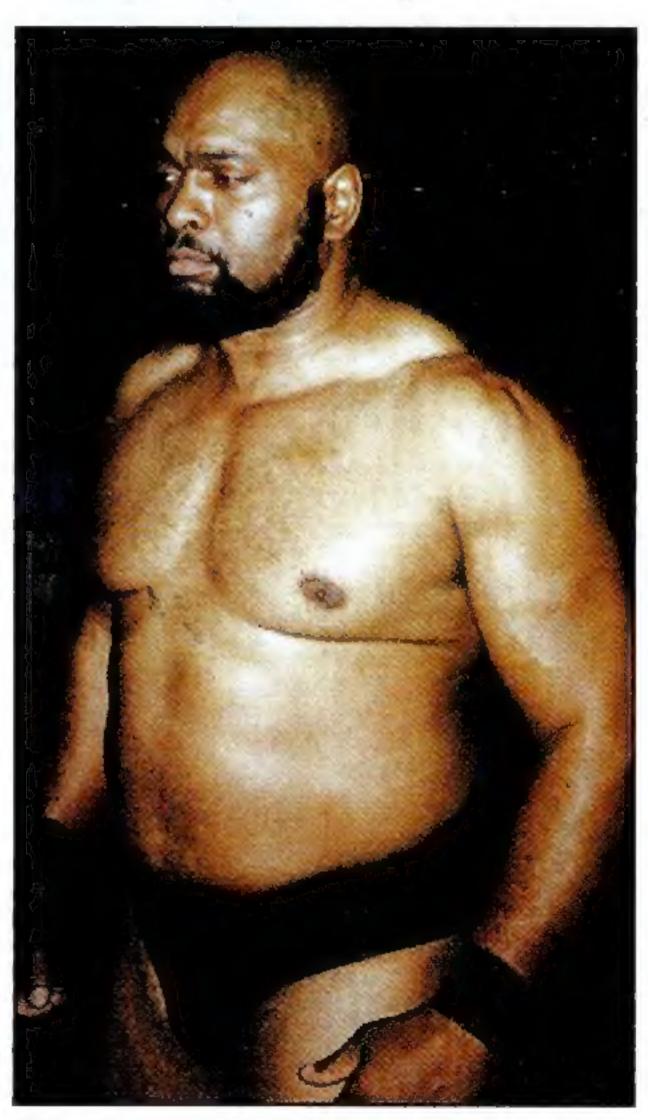
Unfortunately, on March 6, the wrestling world got the bad news that Bad News had passed away at age 63. Apparently, Coage had been in relatively good health until he complained of chest pains that morning. Coage was rushed to Rockyview Hospital in Calgary, Alberta, where he died. The precise cause of death was not known as of press time.

It's amazing to think that Coage had trained and competed in judo for 20 years before he even set foot in a wrestling ring in 1977. From the age of 14, the New York City native devoted his life to competitive judo. He even went to Japan, where he lived in poverty and trained with judo masters. Passion was his sustenance, as his dedication to the mental and physical aspects of the martial art overtook everything else in his life.

With this level of dedication, it was no surprise when Coage—representing the United States—won two gold medals in the heavyweight division in consecutive Pan-American Games. Eventually, Coage made it to the 1976 Olympic Games in Montreal. There, he lost to German star Gunther Neureuther in a split decision. Neureuther was awarded the silver medal, and Coage went on to win the bronze medal in a consolation match.

It always irked Coage that he failed to do any better than a bronze. He was so frustrated, in fact, that he skipped closing ceremonies. Today, the medal hangs at the Crawford Judo & Karate School, a dojo owned by Coage's old coach.

Japanese pro wrestling scouts, always on the lookout for new talent, offered to train Coage shortly after that. Although Coage had never been a wrestling fan, he thought an extended stay in Japan would allow him to continue his judo training as well.



Allen Coage, otherwise known as Bad News Allen and Bad News Brown, was a loner in the wrestling business. Considering his stellar judo background, this tough guy didn't need anyone else.

Antonio Inoki, who prided his own skills as an all-around athlete, immediately respected Coage's talent and potential. Coage trained at Inoki's dojo and debuted for New Japan. He went on to enjoy a working relationship with the company for the next 15 years.

Bret Hart and Dynamite Kid, who had an amazing series of matches in Japan, met Coage during this period.

They persuaded Stu Hart to make Coage an offer. Coage made his first tour of Stampede Wrestling in 1982. Hart was so impressed that he kept asking Coage to return, and—as Bad News Allen—he became Bret Hart's primary rival. Allen went on to become a four-time North American champion.

Of course, Coage is best known for his run as Bad News Brown in the WWF. Although he had wrestled a few matches for the old WWWF in the late-1970s, this was his first high-profile run in the United States. His ghetto blaster finisher was actually a version of the enzuigiri, which had been rarely seen in the U.S. to that point.

His biggest win during this period was a battle royal victory at WrestleMania IV, where, ironically, he eliminated Bret Hart, sparking another chapter in their old rivalry. He went on to have a series of matches against WWF World champion Randy Savage in early-1989 (see "Wrestling's Greatest Photos," Inside Wrestling, page 25). The following year, he feuded with Roddy Piper. Perhaps the most notorious phase of his WWF career was a feud with Jake Roberts in which he produced a Harlem sewer rat to counter Jake's snake, Damien. Following some World title matches against Hulk Hogan, Coage had a brief run as a fan favorite before leaving the WWF.

Coage often returned to Japan in the 1990s. He had a successful run in Japan's notoriously rugged UWFI promotion. And, through all of this, Coage suffered from hemophilia. Fortunately, he was not known for blood matches during his career. Knee damage forced Coage to retire in 1998. It certainly wasn't a bad run for Coage, considering he was 55 years old at the time of his retirement.

I appreciate the fact that Coage, who had dedicated himself to another



Most American fans know Coage from his run as Bad News Brown in the WWF, where he battled fellow Olympian Ken Patera. Unfortunately for Coage, he didn't win gold in the Olympics or the WWF.

sport earlier in his life, brought that same dedication to pro wrestling. As is often the case, athletes from other backgrounds often dismiss pro wrestling as a circus. It's not until these athletes make the transition to pro wrestling and find out how difficult it really is that they profess their respect for it. Then these wrestlers, because of their mainstream athletic backgrounds, become the sport's greatest ambassadors. And no one legitimizes pro wrestling as much as Olympians. In honor of Bad News, let's remember other Olympians who turned out to be fine pro wrestlers.

Chris Adams: Like Coage, Adams was a judoka, specializing in the martial art of judo. Adams was on the Olympic squad that Great Britain sent to the 1976 Olympic Games, where Coage won his bronze medal, but never had the opportunity to actually compete. Adams' brother, Neil, went on to win silver medals in 1980 and 1984.

Chris Taylor: The heaviest Olympian ever at 412 pounds, Taylor won a bronze medal at the 1972 Summer Games in freestyle wrestling. Verne Gagne was mighty impressed with Taylor and persuaded him to join the AWA, where he faced a young Ric Flair. He died of a heart attack at the age of 29 in 1979.

Brad Rheingans: This former NCAA champion placed fourth in

Greco-Roman wrestling at the 1976 Olympics in Montreal. He also qualified for the 1980 Olympics, but the U.S. boycott of that event dashed his hopes that year. He debuted in the AWA in 1983 and spent his career there until the company's demise in 1990.

Mark Henry: Vince McMahon was so impressed by Henry's weightlifting background and equally impressed by his interest in pro wrestling that he signed him to an unprecedented 10-year contract immediately after Henry competed in the 1996 Olympic Games. Henry was on the verge of having a breakout year in 2006 before severely injuring his knee during a six-man match on Saturday Night's Main Event.

Kurt Angle: He's the ultimate example, isn't he? Angle was the first Olympic gold medalist to make a serious attempt at pro wrestling, and some people would argue that he may be the greatest in-ring performer in the history of the business.

Going further back, I can think of other Olympic standouts such as Ken Patera, Bob Roop, Dale Lewis, Danny Hodge, Mad Dog Vachon, Henry DeGlane, Ed Don George, Earl McCready, and even The Iron Sheik.

Allen Coage maintained that rich tradition. Pro wrestling was lucky to have him ... even if judo was his first love.

LUTISS PALUPDATE WITH FRANKING INGSI

EXCLUSIVELY ON pwi-online.com

Pro Wrestling Illustrated Managing Editor Frank Ingiosi, is insightful, provocative, and downight funny! You've read "The Trade's Mark" in PWI. Now check out Frank's column, "The Turn," every Friday afternoon.

Hanny "The Undertaker looked great, hitting spot after spot and manhandling Henry as if he were a sack of potatoes (which, ironically, will rank three spots higher than Henry in this year's PWI 500.)"

Inglosi On Joey Styles! Promo:

"Nothing was sacred, as Styles attacked some of the company's ridiculous storylines, as well as the chairman himself. Basically, for one beautiful three-minute span. Styles was the voice of every disgruntled fan."

something relatively interesting happens soon, because I'm actually getting tired of this weekly, mind-numbingly repetitive cattight between Mickie James, Ashley, and Trish. It's actually gotten to the point where it bores me both as a wrestling fan and as a man. Did I just write that?"

Frank Ingiosi ... on pwi-online.com!

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lot alone, s

Thumbs Up to Melina. When Trish Stratus walked away from WWE after Unforgiven last September, it was unclear as to which woman—or women—would carry the torch in her absence. While many directed their attention toward Mickie James, and rightfully so, few gave much credit to the feisty former manager of M-N-M as a viable wrestler, let alone as a WWE women's champion. But Melina has proven everyone wrong. Melina is a very unlikely, yet deserving, women's champion. The future of WWE's women's division is suddenly a

lot less murky, and much more exciting. For that

alone, she deserves our praise.

Thumbs Up to Steve Austin. With a budding career as an action star in the very near future, and adoring legions of fans still hanging on his every word even years after his full-time career has ended, Austin is still one of the most bankable icons in the history of the sport. Although Austin is still coping with this awkward phase of his career, between modern star and future legend, Vince McMahon was correct in assuming that "Stone-Cold" would give WrestleMania 23 a feeling of timelessness. Or, at the

very least, maybe Mr. McMahon was hoping that he'd have someone with head-shaving experience in the ring.



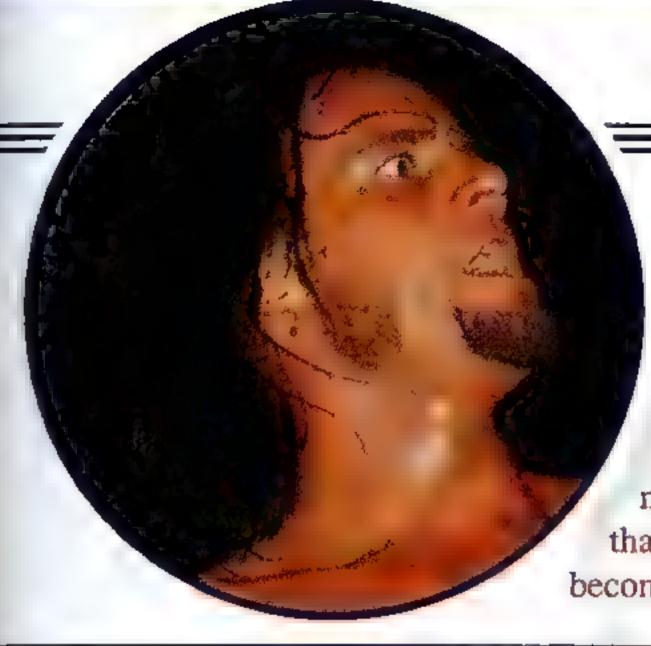
Thumbs Up to Vampiro. In a career marked by international success as well as brief stints of popularity in the U.S., Vampiro finally gained championship recognition as the inaugural champion of Wrestling Society X. Unfortunately, the mysterious one may prove to be to WSX what the Los Angeles Xtreme was to the XFL. As of press time, WSX seems headed for the dustbin of wrestling history. Still, that shouldn't take away from Vampiro's accomplishment and all-too-brief moment in the spotlight. Now that Vampiro has returned to the fore, perhaps WWE or TNA

can make him an offer if WSX goes out of business.

Thumbs Up to Dusty Rhodes. The "American Dream" is living proof of the cyclical, forgiving nature of professional wrestling. Although he achieved most of his success in the NWA, Rhodes was formally inducted into the WWE Hall of Fame during WrestleMania weekend, taking his rightful place with the all-time greats of the company. Although the master of the wandering promo has been in less of an inring role in today's WWE, opting for more of a behind-the-scenes career, his influence is still seen throughout the sport. Congratulations to one of the toughest men to ever don yellow polka dots.



thunbs down



Thumbs Down to C.M. Punk. As much as it pains us to do so, we're going to have to give Punk the first "thumbs down" of his WWE career. What has happened to the once-unbeatable ECW grappler who appeared well on his way to ascending the lofty heights set for him? Suddenly very vulnerable, Punk has suffered a few losses as of late. With Rob Van Dam also losing some matches recently, this was the perfect time for Punk to capitalize and become ECW's undisputed most popular star. Nevertheless, we have confidence

that Punk will recapture the fiery passion that has become his trademark.

Thumbs Down to Donald Trump. Generally, anyone who outfoxes Mr. McMahon is worthy of a huge "thumbs up," however The Donald deserves some criticism. Not only did Trump reveal the name of his chosen combatant in the "Battle Of The Billionaires" to numerous outlets prior to the formal announcement on Raw, but the reality television star/business mogul also got ECW champion Bobby Lashley's name wrong. Referring to Lashley as "Lindsey," Trump vowed victory in the battle at WrestleMania 23 and promised that it

would be Mr. McMahon's head that would be shaved by night's end. At least he got Vince's name right.



Thumbs Down to Christian Cage. The NWA World champion manipulated nearly everyone in sight prior to his title defense against Samoa Joe at Destination X. While this is nothing new for Cage, who has often allowed his mouth to get him into trouble, he ended up antagonizing his allies, Tomko and Scott Steiner. Because Cage survived Joe's challenge with his World championship intact, Tomko and Steiner are now demanding title shots. Considering how Cage is treating his friends as of late, it's going to be hard to determine who are his enemies.

Thumbs Down to Batista. It's somewhat fitting that the man who frequently uses the "thumbs down" gesture as the indicator of his finishing move is now headed into WrestleMania 23 and his epic Smackdown World title match with The Undertaker, Batista made no excuses for his lack of respect toward 'Taker and fell into a disconnect with many of his loyal fans. Trying to retain the strap is one thing, but sacrificing your principles to do so definitely earns a "thumbs down."



GIMMICK MATCHES SHOULDN'T BEUSED FOR TITLE BOUTS

By Frank Krewda

than any other group of fans, those of us who recall the territorial days of professional wrestling miss the championship treatment titleholders received from their particular promotions.

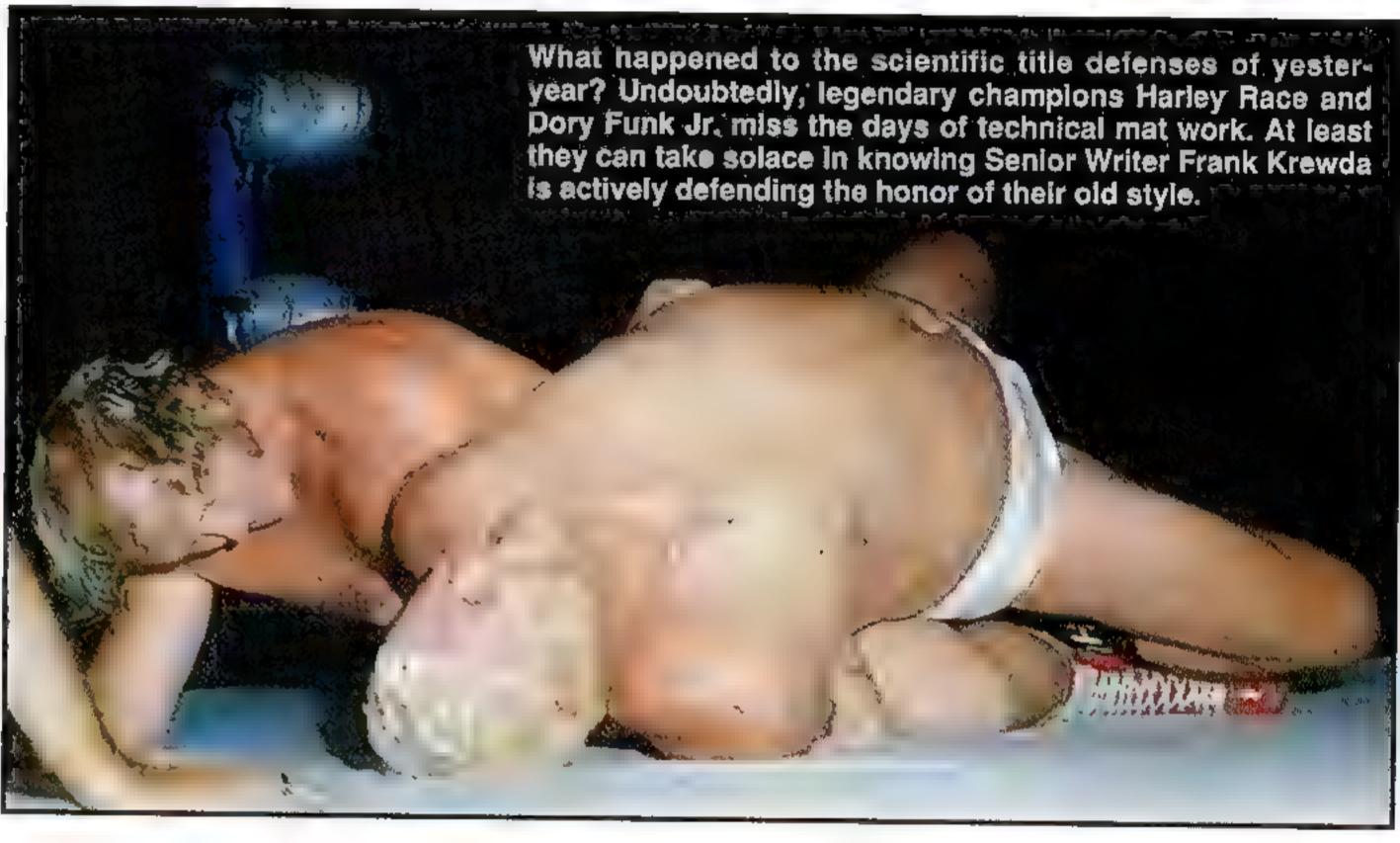
Champions were special wrestlers and handled with special care. Appearances on weekly TV and house shows were kept to a minimum. Promos and interviews were given in measured doses.

And above all, title defenses were upheld as the quintessential sporting experience a wrestling fan could witness.

Can there be any more effective way to diminish a championship bout's prestige and significance than by burying the event in some cheap gimmick? Case in point: TNA's "Ultimate X" matches to decide the X division champion. Essentially, TNA has reduced the lifelong championship aspirations of several talented competitors to a high-wire act.

While I won't deny that pro wrestling has evolved (for better or worse), I defy anybody to defend the notion that aerial gymnastics has anything to do with professional wrestling—least of all when a champion is to be crowned.

Yes, today's brand of wrestling is all about sports entertainment. I may be in the minority, but I will



argue that "sport" is still a critical ingredient. Where is the sport in a glorified scaffold match? Mat skills, scientific acumen, and chain wrestling not only become unnecessary, they become disadvantages.

If the purpose of a title match is to establish the so-called best wrestler of the organization, shouldn't that determination be made on the basis of the wrestler's wrestling ability?

Call me old-fashioned, but I think the NWA had it right. This long-revered organization rarely allowed extreme stipulations—or gimmicks—to soil their title matches. Even the idea of a steel cage title bout was fodder for marathon roundtable discussions, voted upon by territorial members. Obviously, the men who sat around those tables understood the deleterious, long-term ramifications of junking up a championship match.

These days, Vince McMahon, among others, nods and winks at any crazy suggestion fans request on wwe.com. No doubt, WWE and TNA are following their instincts to give the fans what they want. It's a sound strategy in an era when the mandate is to convert fan support into cash at all costs. Being on Wall Street will put that kind of pressure on a company.

But I don't want to hear anyone bemoan the fact that championship belts no longer mean very much these days. The solution isn't to scrap gimmick matches altogether. They serve a very useful purpose in today's version of the sport. But they have no place being the backdrop for title bouts. I say, let championship matches sink or sail on its own merits, not some cheap dogand-pony show.

Frank Krewda is a senior writer for The Wrestler.

GUIL FURTHER

GIMMICK MATCHES ARE LEGITIMATE FOR TITLE BOUTS

By Lisa Rocchi

HANKS FOR THE history lesson, Frank. But for the rest of us who are living in 2007, those old NWA 90-minute, two-out-

of-three-falls marathons no longer do the trick.

That's no slight to wrestlers such as Harley Race, Dory Funk Jr., or Jack Brisco, who enthralled fans for years with their technical acumen. The problem is, their heyday was years and years ago. Not only has professional wrestling evolved over that time, so has entertainment, not to mention the attention span of wrestling fans. Wholesome one-on-one competition is no longer enough to keep fans interested.

The advent of more athletically gifted superstars has raised the bar on performance. WWE, TNA, and all promotions have a duty to keep pace with the abilities of the people on their rosters as well as the fans' tastes. And yes, WWE has a duty to its shareholders to convert fan support into cash. Like it or not, that's the current state of affairs in professional wrestling.

it's only a natural progression that gimmick matches have become part of some title bouts. Which is a more compelling spectacle: Rhino vs. A.J.

Styles in an "Ironman" match or Styles and Rhino battling it out several feet above the ring? Which specter has more fans on the edge of their seats: a 20-foot free fall or a pinfall? There's no comparison.

Title matches should change with the evolving fans, according to Managing Editor Lisa Rocchi. TNA has cornered the market in regard to revolutionary title matches, which might anger tradi- the fun. Mat-based grunttionalists, but is good for the industry in general.

I also disagree with the idea that gimmick matches somehow devalue the championship. A title match settles the debate about who's superior in a particular promotion, regardless of a bout's stipulations. If anything, winning or defending a title in a gimmick match demonstrates the victor's adaptability and versatility,

> which I suggest are qualities just as critical to a champion's success as mat skills and scientific acumen.

> Let's face it: Professional wrestling bid goodbye to the dank, smoke-filled arenas when Vince McMahon nationalized the business. That was a huge step forward that required promoters to continually seek out wrestling's next big thing, as did the Monday night ratings war of the late-'90s.

> If seeking out that next big thing means title bouts will incorporate gimmicks, so be it. If it means exposing belt-holders on a more regular basis, so be it. In fact, the need to treat champions with kid gloves is no longer necessary. There are no more territories to build up, and with wrestlers' movements posted on the Internet months before they happen, there are few secrets left.

Don't fight it, Frank. Embrace the change. Join in fests have their place in wrestling history, but not in

the current product—or the future.

Lisa Rocchi is the managing editor of THE WRESTLER.

Intigate of the second second

By Brady Hicks

THORUF MARIUS



Photos By Wayne McCarty

It's easy for Thoruf Marius to get the attention of promoters. First, he stands 6'7" tall and weighs 290 pounds. Second, he has a clean win over Ken Kennedy on his resume. Finally, he's darn good and makes it quite clear he's determined to get even better

HEN THORUF MARIUS faced Ken Anderson at a Midwest Pro Wrestling event a couple of years ago, he had no way of knowing that the match would become one of the most noteworthy of his career. It was a tough back-and-forth battle, but Marius defeated the young man rather handily, defeating him with his finishing maneuver, the bodybag, a version of the F5.

As it turned out, Ken Anderson became better known as Ken Kennedy, who happens to be the hottest-rising star on Smackdown today.

"During that match, I truly grasped how to wrestle as a big guy against a little guy," recalled Marius. "I powered out of Ken's figure-four toward the end, and that's become sort of a signature of mine. I like for a little guy to put me in what seems like an unbreakable hold. Depending on the situation, I'll come up with a brilliant counter or just muscle my way out. And, just from watching Ken during that match, I learned a lot about ring psychology."

The great-grandson of a U.S. immigrant railroad worker, Marius is an old-school wrestler with a new-school mentality. The 6'7", 290-pound fighter loves strongman competitions and kicking butt, whether at the local pub or in the ring. In fact, he readily admits that he would just as soon go to the corner bar and drink a few beers (beating up the other patrons along the way), as he would go work out in the gym. Marius takes on all comers and embraces the idea of a hotly contested battle. Ironically, his toughest opponent might have never come from inside the ring or from the barstool next to him.

In March 2005, Marius was involved in an automobile crash with a drunk driver. The Finnish fighter sustained a



The 6'7" Marius has a definite size advantage over his opponents, but he is determined to prove he is more than just another big man in the industry. Marius wants to be known for his wrestling skills as much as his power.

serious back injury only two years into his career, one that would require surgery and sideline him for eight months. That was a pretty frustrating time in my life," recounted Marius. "Thing's were just starting to take off in the Midwest, and now suddenly I was on the sidelines watching others get to fight. Much of the region also started to dry up. It was around this time that I dedicated myself to making a big impact when I returned. I started watching a lot of tapes and getting more familiar with wrestling today. That's about the time when NOAH in Japan came calling."

While attending a wrestling camp run by Harley Race out of his Missouri school, Marius was scouted by officials with Pro Wrestling NOAH. He's been invited to train and compete across the ocean in the summer of 2007.

"I think—as a wrestler—I'm most excited with making a iving and making a name for myself," said Marius. "I'm real-y hoping this stint with NOAH will open a lot of doors for

me. They seem really excited to have me coming in, which makes me determined to not disappoint them. I want to show my peers here in the U.S. that there is more to the big man than the basic power-based move."

Despite how he is often perceived in the U.S., Thoruf Marius refuses to be stereotyped as a slow, plodding big man. "When I fight smaller men, they are immediately perceived as the underdog against me," said Marius. "So many people see my size and I get automatically put in this role as this lumbering giant. I want to break out of that. I want to change what it means to be a big man. The problem is that people are so often set in their beliefs."

For this reason, Marius believes there is a lot of value in facing men who are the same size or larger, which allows him to show the athletic side he usually has to concede to his smaller opponents. This is much like one of his favorite wrestlers, the late Mike Awesome.

Marius credits the former ECW World champion with his in-ring style and is also an admirer of Chris Jericho's microphone skills. "I'd have to call myself a 'work-in-progress' on the mike," he admitted. "There aren't a whole lot of big men who are given the opportunity to let their true personalities shine through, so I'm hoping to be given that chance someday soon."

Although Marius wants to expand beyond the standard big-man move set, there's no denying that his power maneuvers are among the most impressive in his repertoire. His big boots and chokeslams are devastating, and even his bodybag finisher is a demonstration of pure power. "I can bodybag everyone in sight," bragged

Marius. He also doesn't care whether the local stars are heroes or villains. While Marius has been known to annoy American crowds by claiming that Finland is the superior nation, he has also thrilled fans by shutting up guys who have been running their mouths too long.

According to Marius, wrestling is about learning and trying new things. This is why Marius is constantly looking to
become a better fighter. He also wants to travel the world
and gain experience. In particular, he recounts a conversation he had with TNA's Austin Starr during a road trip. Starr
told him to travel and gain as much experience as possible.

According to Marius, "The best way to really succeed in this business is to surround yourself with it. That's what I've tried to do. Wrestling is a lot of fun, and I think that might be my top goal in this business. I want to have fun."

And whether at the local bar, in the ring, or on the road, Thoruf Marius intends to do just that.

fightelle belle

By Mike Quackenbush

[Editor's note: Mike Quackenbush, who has held numerous titles in the U.S. and beyond, files reports on the life of an independent wrestler seeking to make an impact on the business. In this issue, he writes about the dedication of independent talent and audiences who brave traffic and weather to arrive at their intended destinations.]



IFE IN MY home state of Pennsylvania, generally speaking, isn't particularly perilous. I've lived here all my life, and the idyllic day-to-day routine serves as a fine counterpoint to the hectic times I

spend traversing the globe as an independent wrestler. My hometown of Reading has been named the "heroin capital of the East Coast," yet, I've never been witness to a crime, and the closest thing I have to police interac-

tion is my obligatory, bi-annual speeding ticket. Life here can be a bit bland, and that's just the way I like it.

The wrestling company I helped found and that I consider my home base is CHI-KARA, and, like me, it's a resident of Pennsylvania. Back in the month of February, CHIKARA hosted the largest trios tournament ever staged in the United States, featuring 16 three-man teams from around the world. The tournament, obese as it was, took three whole days to complete—February 16, 17, and 18. The event had been meticulously planned, organized, and promoted since Thanksgiving weekend of 2006, giving new and old fans plenty of time to find out about it.

With male and female wrestlers coming

from all over our country, as well as from Canada, Mexico, and Japan, a great deal of time and effort was spent behind the scenes, making sure all the logistics were expertly handled before the long-awaited King of Trios tournament arrived. A caravan from Montreal, headed by our Young Lions Cup champion Max Boyer, was set to ride. CMLL star El Pantera would take a train from his home in Queretaro to the airport in Mexico City for his international flight, MIYAWAKI and Yoshiaki Yago of the Kaientai Dojo would leave Chiba, Japan, and spend 21 hours total in the air with three layovers to make it to King of Trios. It seemed like everything had been handled on our end. We could not have been more ready. Just 72 hours before the first match of the tournament was set to kick off, Mother Nature decided to turn heel on us.

One of the worst snow and ice storms in recent history beset my tranquil home state, and did so with a vengeance. Schools and businesses closed, flights were rerouted or canceled outright, and some boroughs lost electrical and telephone service. With just a day left before the tournament, temperatures were not yet high enough to melt even the top layers of ice-coated snow.

Then, one of the strangest incidents in traffic history took center stage just as King of Trios was set to premiere. One of eastern Pennsylvania's major thruways, Route 78, became the scene of a massive traffic tie up. The road was closed, and after 24 hours with lit-



Nothing could stop MIYAWAKI, Yoshiaki Yago, and Kudo from CHIKARA's King of Trios tournament. MIYAWAKI and Yago flew for 21 hours and endured three layovers while traveling from Chiba, Japan, to Reading, Pennsylvania. And then they had to suffer the delays of the Pennsylvania roadways.



Mike Quackenbush was so charged by the enthusiasm and dedication of the CHIKARA fan base that weathered the snowstorm to see the show that he, along with partners Jigsaw and Shane Storm, won the tournament.

the progress, the Army National Guard was called in, to assist local law enforcement with the giant automotive morass. With this condition burgeoning statewide, eastern Pennsylvania's two other major roadways, Interstates 80 and 81, were also forced to close, essentially removing all major routes to the venues playing host to the weekend's King of Trios tournament.

As soon as I turned on my cellular phone Friday morning, the messages came rolling in. Wrestlers needed alternate sets of directions to get to the events. Planes were late, heading to

other cities, or just not coming. Even the truck that transports the CHIKARA ring to our shows ended up stuck in a snow bank. Several parts of eastern Pennsylvania were declared to be in a state of emergency, and local newscasts were recommending that travel should be kept to a minimum and that those residing in the areas where conditions were worst should not even venture out. These kinds of things rarely help sell tickets at independent wrestling events, as you can probably imagine.

The statutes that govern professional wrestling here in Pennsylvania stipulate that an event cannot commence until a licensed physician is at ringside to oversee the bouts. On the first night of King of Trios, not only was half the roster missing in action come bell time ... so too was our ringside doctor. This provided us with a bit of a scapegoat, as everyone in the building—fans and wrestlers alike—fought off mounting impatience until almost all the necessary participants were finally in-house. The opening match started just an hour past our advertised bell time.

Those matches featuring wrestlers furthest from the venue were commuted to later parts of the card, so that those already dressed and stretched could hit the ring. With each pinfall or submission, the time lessened for the unaccounted few to arrive. Luckily for us, the only tournament participant that didn't make it in time was Japanese independent Nobutaka Moribe, and he was quickly replaced by visiting Osaka Pro star Masamune. By Night Two of the tournament, everyone was sufficiently aware of the poor travel conditions and planned to arrive early. Thankfully, everyone else appeared as scheduled that weekend.

In my mind though, the story of King of Trios weekend isn't just that of dedicated professionals that did everything possible to appear where they were advertised, nor is it simply a tale of a giant tournament unlike anything ever attempted domestically. On every night of the tournament, we set new attendance records at each of the respective venues. Those of us that were there will remember, with at least some astonishment, how many courageous souls braved the highways and byways to come see us. This expansive, expensive tournament, sans ticket-buying fans, would have surely bankrupted my home promotion. No state of emergency, nor any amount of warnings to the contrary, would keep our fans from venturing out on King of Trios weekend, and, lucky for us, it didn't.

I have heard some promotions boldly claim that they'd be nothing without their fans, and, for us at CHIKARA, that is as plain as the truth gets.

Spotlight On.

SEAN WALTMAN

IS CAREER HAS been one of the most tumultuous in wrestling history. With more ring names than perhaps any other competitor in history, Sean "6-Pac" Waltman has established a mixed legacy over the years. From several championship reigns and appearances for every major American promotion to humili-

ating personal struggles, Waltman's story is interesting and exciting ... Beginning his training with the Malenko family in 1990, Waltman took the name "The Lightning Kid" as a reflection of his speed and smaller size ... Wrestled for Pro Wrestling America, twice winning the light heavy-weight title and the PWA Iron Horse TV

title ... Joined the Global Wrestling Federation, capturing the GWF junior heavyweight championship ... Often feuded and teamed with Jerry Lynn in the PWA and GWF ... Returned to the PWA in 1993, winning the tag team championship twice with Lynn ... Also won the Mid-Eastern Wrestling Federation light heavyweight belt Debuted in the World Wrestling Federation in early-1993, losing his debut match to Louie Spicolli ... Went by "Cannonball Kid" and "The Lightning Kid" in the WWF ... Upset Razor Ramon (Scott Hall) on Monday Night Raw and changed his name to "The 1-2-3 Kid" ... Became friends with Hall on-air and in real life ... Beat Irwin R. Schyster at Summer-Slam 1993 in his WWF pay-per-view debut ... Helped Razor Ramon's 1993 Survivor Series team

WWF World tag team championship with Marty Jannetty in January 1994 ... Lost the tag belts back to The Quebecers one week later ... One year after winning his first WWF tag team championship, won his second in January 1995 by teaming with Bob Holly and winning a tournament final at The Royal Rumble ... Lost the championship to The Smokin' Gunns one night later ... Turned against Ramon at the end of 1995 to join Ted DiBiase's Million-Dollar Corporation ... Sole survivor in his 1995 Survivor Series match ... Went on a losing streak in early-1996 ... Left the WWF in the summer of 1996 to join Scott Hall and Kevin Nash in World Championship Wrestling ... Showed up with a ticket for the front row of a live WCW Monday Nitro in September 1996, declaring his allegiance to The New World Order ... Name changed to "Syxx" as a result of being the sixth man to join the NWO ... Defeated "Hacksaw" Jim Duggan in his Nitro debut ... Beat Chris Jericho in his WCW pay-per-view debut at Halloween Havoc in October 1996 ... His popularity began to grow in the NWO and he became part of the Wolfpac, a trio within the faction also comprised of Hall and Nash ... Often carried a video camera to record vignettes of the Wolfpac's troublemaking activities ... Called "Syxx-Pac" by his Wolfpac comrades ... Stole the United States championship belt from Eddie Guerrero, leading to a ladder match at the 1997 Souled Out pay-per-view ... Lost the match to Guerrero ... Won the WCW cruiserweight championship from Dean Malenko at Superbrawl VII ... Lost the belt to Chris Jericho at the first-ever Internet-exclusive broadcast of a WCW live event in Los Angeles ... Feuded with Ric Flair, parodying the multi-time champion in a controversial NWO parody of Arn Anderson's retirement speech ... This parody got him lambasted by Jim Cornette a week later on Monday Night Raw...Cornette referenced

defeat Ted DiBiase's team ... Won the



America and Texas' Global Wrestling Federation would be

their battlegrounds.





July 1991: The Lightning Kid becomes the first GWF junior heavyweight champion when he beats Jerry Lynn in a tournament final in Dallas. His first reign would last only two months, however.

Waltman's reputation for drug and alcohol abuse ... Feuded with The Four Horsemen for the bulk of 1997, primarily teaming with Hall and Nash to face different Horsemen and NFL star Kevin Greene ... Represented Kevin Nash in a tag team title defense against The Steiner Brothers and lost the belts for his team ... Suffered a neck injury in October 1997 ... Fired from WCW by Eric Bischoff, reportedly via FedEx, to keep Hall and Nash "in line" backstage in March 1998 ... Showed up on Raw one week later and

joined Triple-H's new DeGenera-

tion X ... Announced that Hall and Nash were trapped in their contracts in WCW or else they'd have also joined DX ... Took yet another ring name, "X-Pac," a duel reference to his nickname, "Syxx-Pac," and being an ex-member of the Wolfpac ... Participated in the DX invasion of WCW events ... Spent 1998 teaming with Triple-H and other DX members ... Defeated Jeff Jarrett in a hair-vs.-hair match at SummerSlam 1998 ... Beat D-Lo Brown for the European championship in September 1998 ... Held the European championship until early-1999 ... Lost the European belt, split from DX, and joined Kane ... Won the WWF World tag team championship twice with Kane ... With manager Tori, turned against Kane ... Began real-life relationship with WWF Diva Ryan Shamrock ... Sidelined with another neck injury in the fall of 2000 ... Returned to the WWF, creating a group called "X Factor" with Albert and Justin



August 1993: In his highest-profile match to date, Waltman (known as The 1-2-3 Kid) loses to Irwin R. Schyster in a hotly contested match at Order, Waltman (appropriately named Syxx) defeats Chris SummerSlam. Just a few months earlier, an upset victory over Razor Ramon (Scott Hall) had put his career on the fast track.



October 1996: As the sixth member of The New World Jericho at his first WCW pay-per-view, Halloween Havoc. Waltman would also feud with Jericho in the WWF.



February 1997: Syxx begins his reign as WCW cruiserweight champion after beating Dean Malenko at Superbrawl. Thanks to the frequent interference of his NWO teammates, Syxx would hold the title for four months.

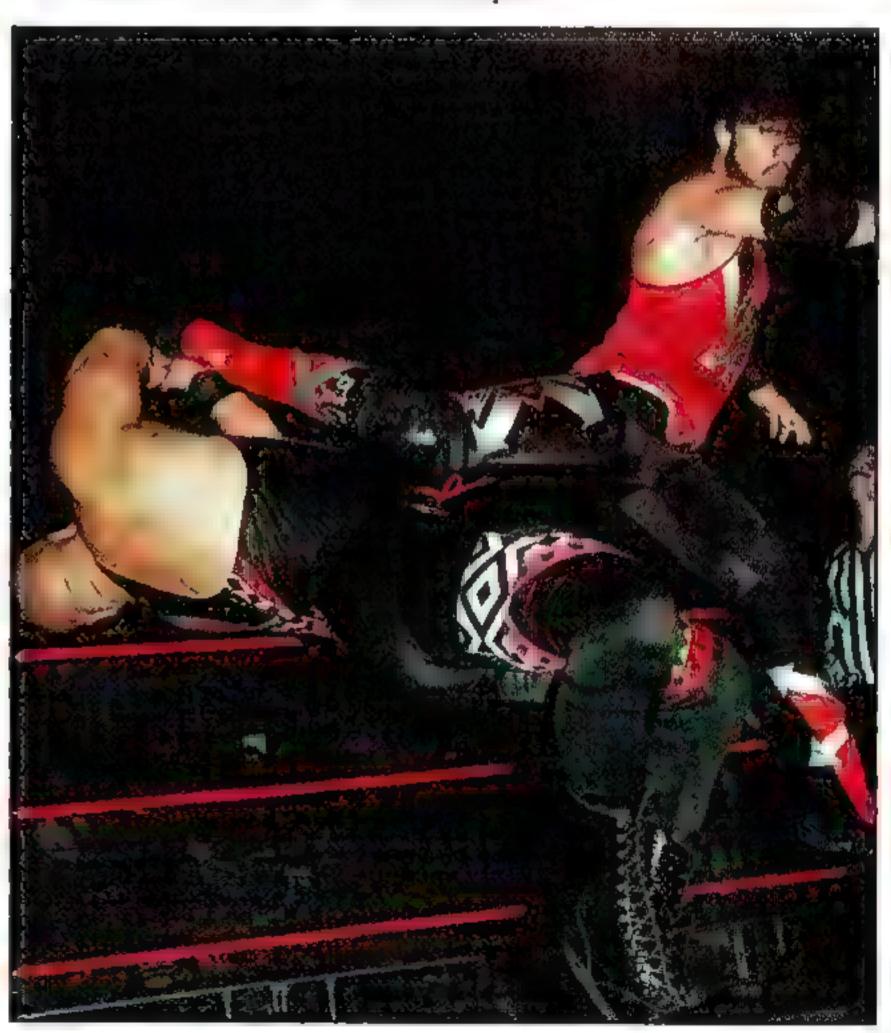
Credible ... The team split up shortly after the WCW/ECW invasion ... United the WWF light heavyweight and WCW cruiserweight championships by beating Billy Kidman ... Injured again, took a few months off for rehab ... Trained younger wrestlers in Ohio Valley while preparing for his return to the WWF ... Returned to the WWF in the spring of 2002 as a member of the new NWO, joining Hall and Nash, and macking former member Hulk Hogan ... Feuded with Kane, stealing the monster's mask ... Battled Goldust and Booker T on several occasions ... Released again from WE in August 2002 ... Joined TNA the following month ... Appeared as Sean "Syxx-Pac" Waltman ... Teamed with former NWO and DX teammates B.G. James and Scott Hall ... Won the TNA X division championship in a ladder match in October 2002 ... Lost the X division belt to A.J. Styles two weeks later ... Wrestled for

XPW, using the names "Pac" and "X" ... Won the XPW TV championship ... Became engaged to real-life girlfriend Joanie Laurer (Chyna) ... Left TNA after a backstage argument with Vince Russo led to him no-showing a pay-per-view Competed for 3PW ... Returned to TNA as Vince Russo's surprise opponent for Sting and Jeff Jarrett, teaming with independent appearances this period.

for companies such as Fusion, Border City Wrestling, and Vince Russo's Ring of Glory ... Also wrestled in Japan ... Returned to TNA with Kevin Nash in



August 1998: Back in the WWF, Waltman (now known as X-Pac) defeats Jeff Jarrett in a hair-vs.-hair match at SummerSlam. It is a big victory in DeGeneration X's feud with Jarrett's Southern Justice clique.



Jeff Jarrett, teaming with A.J. Styles ... Continued ments tend to be overshadowed by his antics with DX during this period.

February 2005 ... Joined Planet Jarrett briefly in TNA ... Wrestled for more independents, such as Full Impact Pro ... Feuded with longtime friend and rival Jerry

Lynn in TNA ... Released a controversial adult film video featuring Joanie Laurer, his ex-fiancée ... The tape won an award for being the top-selling title in the adult entertainment industry ... Left TNA, presumably for good ... Confronted Laurer regarding personal issues on VH1's reality series The Surreal Life ... Wrestled for independent promotion NWA Pro in late-2006 ... Competed for the newly created Wrestling Society X as "6-Pac," winning a gauntlet hardcore match for a shot at the WSX championship ... Lost the WSX championship match to Vampiro in the second

episode that aired on MTV ... Feuded with WSX stars Human Tornado and Quicksilver ... Reunited with former girl-friend Ryan Shamrock (now known by her real name, Alicia Webb) ... Continued to



May 2001: The newly formed X-Factor seems to be disintegrating already as X-Pac, Justin Credible, and Albert struggle against The Dudley Boyz. X-Pac's stint as a faction leader is not a successful one.

wrestle for WSX in singles action while teaming with Scott Hall on the independent scene ... His future is uncertain amid rumors that MTV may cancel WSX ... Considering

Waltman's achievements in WSX, WWE, TNA, WCW, and other promotions around the world, his colorful career will be remembered by fans for years to come.

June 2005: Waltman is a major reason why A.J. Styles fails to emerge from a "King Of The Mountain" match with his NWA title belt intact. Raven went on to win this encounter, and the Waltman-Styles feud continued for the next couple of months.



January 2007: Perhaps the most famous name in the fledgling Wrestling

Society X, Waltman (competing as 6-Pac) becomes a respected member

of the locker room, which includes Kaos, Teddy Hart, Chris Hamrick,

and Jack Evans. The future of WSX-and Waltman-is now unclear.

28 The Wrestler

Larry Zbyszko

I Wanted To Be Like My Hero

IS LIFE STORY would make a great movie. Consider this plot: A young teenager tracks down his idol, walks into the man's backyard, and introduces himself. That idol, who happens to be a world champion, accepts the kid as his protégé. Several years into the relationship, the student turns against the teacher, setting up a rivalry for the ages.

Although nothing is a sure thing in the film industry, a media group based in Orlando, Florida, has shown interest in turning Larry Zbyszko's life story into a movie. In fact, the media group has posted a casting call for extras on Zbyszko's website, larryzbyszko.com. The movie would be based on Zbyszko's autobiography, tentatively titled Adventures in Larryland, which ECW Press plans to release this fall.

Zbyszko had a charmed introduction to the wrestling business, as the protégé of Bruno Sammartino. Initially, the WWWF champion refused to give the youngster any wrestling lessons, instructing him to get his college diploma first. Instead, they would often lift weights for more than three hours a day together.

By age 20, Zbyszko could benchpress 400 pounds, although his mentor always won any tests of strength. When Zbyszko finished college, Sammartino lived up to his promise and trained his young friend for a career in the ring. And, as the pro-

tégé of the mighty Bruno, even the oldtimers treated Zbyszko with respect and patience. Zbyszko was named 1974's Rookie of the Year.

Yet Zbyszko was the runaway winner of the Most Hated Wrestler of the Year Award in 1980. Why? That's the year Zbyszko turned against Sammartino and smashed a chair over his mentor's head on WWF television.

As a result, Zbyszko became the most despised wrestler in the country. His cage

match against Sammartino in front of 40 671 fans on August 9, 1980, is considered a forerunner to the modern-day supercard. So, just how big was the Zbyszko-Sammartino bout? Andre the Giant vs. Hulk Hogan was on the mid-card.

In the 27 years since that event, controversy has followed the "New Living Legend" wherever he has gone—whether it has been the AWA, the NWA, or WCW.

Most recently, Zbyszko served as TNA's director of authority until he suffered a humiliating loss to Eric Young in a "Loser Gets Fired" match. Now rumors are swirling that Zbyszko is already tapped as a color commentator for Impact ... if TNA's flagship program is granted a second hour on Spike TV.

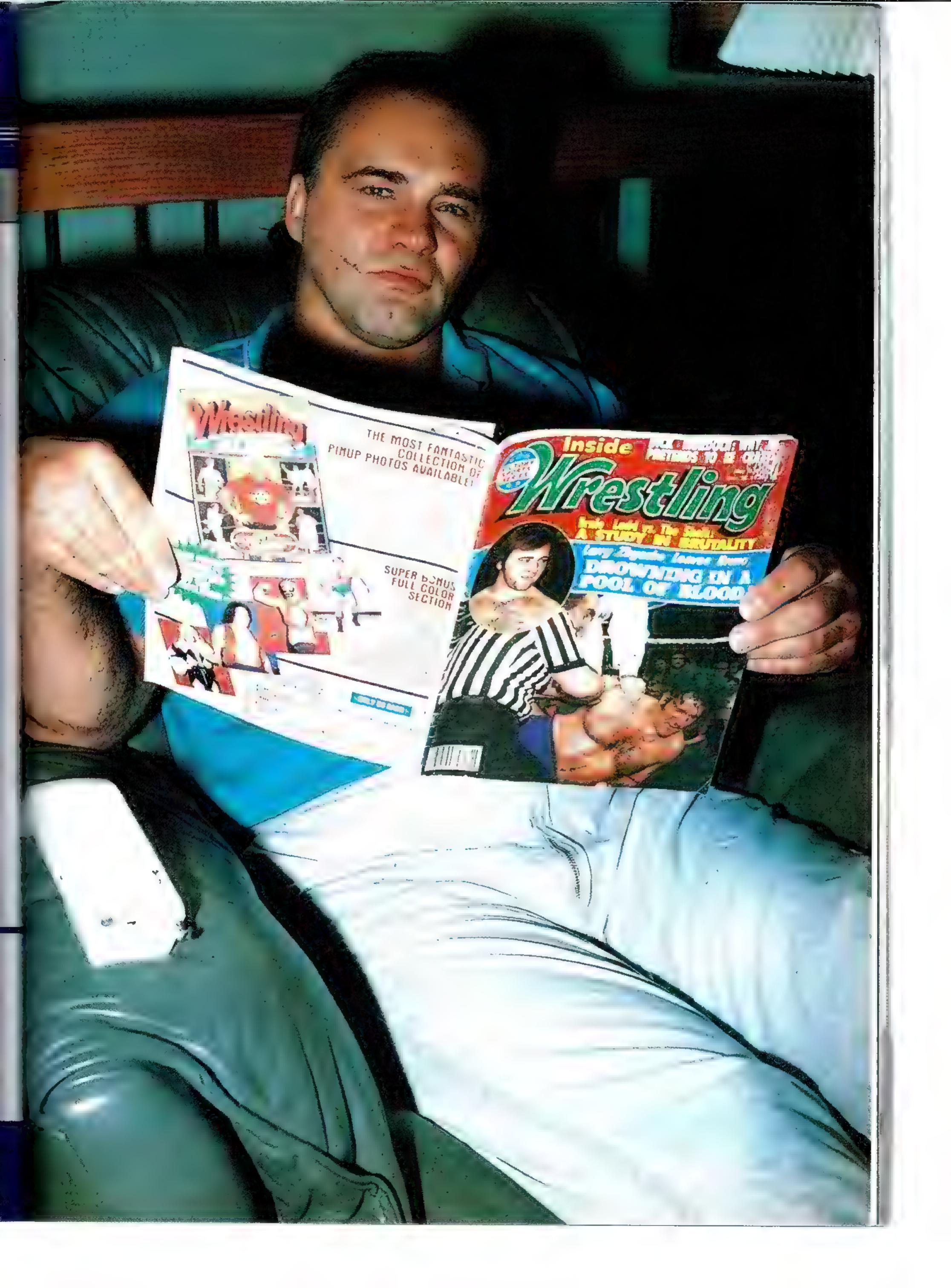
Currently, Zbyszko lives in Florida with his wife, Kathy, and has four sons, Mike, Tim, John, and Bob, ranging in ages between 14 and 20

ranging in ages between 14 and 29.

"I found Zbyszko to be quite a gentleman," noted Editor-in-Chief Harry Burkett, who conducted this 90-minute interview. "Was he loud? Yes. Was he opinionated? Yes. Did he make any apologies? No. But I knew he was shooting straight with every answer. Zbyszko, for so many reasons, is a truly historic figure in this business."

Q: Before we delve into your career, I'd like to get your thoughts on the current state of wrest-ling. Recently, Spike TV put three hours of

After we moved to Pittsburgh, I discovered Studio Wrestling, which aired every Saturday night. Bruno was the WWWF champion and there were other big names such as George Steele, Dr. Bill Miller, and Prof. Tanaka. It hit me right away. Wrestling was my destiny.





Now that Zbyszko is in semi-retirement, one of his favorite pastimes—other than golf—is appearing alongside other wrestling greats like Harley Race at nostalgia and sports conventions such as this one, promoted by Eric Simms' ESS Promotions.

wrestling—a two-hour special called This is TNA and TNA's weekly program, Impact—against a special Thursday night edition of WWE Raw. In effect, this is the first head-to-head matchup between TNA and WWE. What are TNA's chances against WWE?

- A: So far, I think TNA is doing pretty good. TNA came from nothing, encountered a few bumps on the road, made it to the point that fans got to know the product on Spike TV, and now has a prime time show. TNA is plugging along and will no doubt have a two-hour show in the future. The fans really can't wait for a war between TNA and WWE, and that's good for the business.
- Q: Is it wise for TNA to go headto-head?
- A: Maybe not now; no more than a one-time special. But, once TNA gets bigger, there's no reason it shouldn't go after

- WWE. The reason why two wrestling shows used to do a combined 11.0 rating on Monday nights is because fans knew the competition between the two companies was absolutely real. I'd say there's a good chance of that happening again in the very near future.
- Q: You were TNA's director of authority before losing a "Loser Gets Fired" match to Eric Young. What is your status with TNA?
- A: From what I understand, there's a possibility that TNA will go to two hours fairly soon—or at least everyone is preparing for that eventuality. In that case, I would most likely do some color commentating. Yeah, you haven't seen me since the Eric Young bit. My complaint with TNA is that angles are rushed too quickly—everything is too fast. Hopefully, in a commentary role, I can add some depth and provide a wrestler's point of view at the announce table.
- Q: Do you miss the action inside the ring? Have you ever thought of fulfilling the same kind of role as Finlay on Smackdown, as a veteran who helps bring along younger talent in the ring?
- A: I could wrestle, but I don't want to do it a lot anymore. I've been real lucky with injuries, Harry. Even though I'm 55, I can still hit a golf ball 300 yards, and I feel great. I don't want to push my luck in the ring. I may do an occasional tag team match, or a couple of little things for TNA. I'm slowing way down on the wrestling and trying to stick with the autograph and nostal-gia shows. My boots are close to getting bronzed.
- Q: I would imagine those bootlaces are nearly worn out by now.
- A: My actual boots have blown up, but I still have my laces. It's like an old kung fu story. Dean Ho gave me white parachute cords for my boots in 1974, and I'm

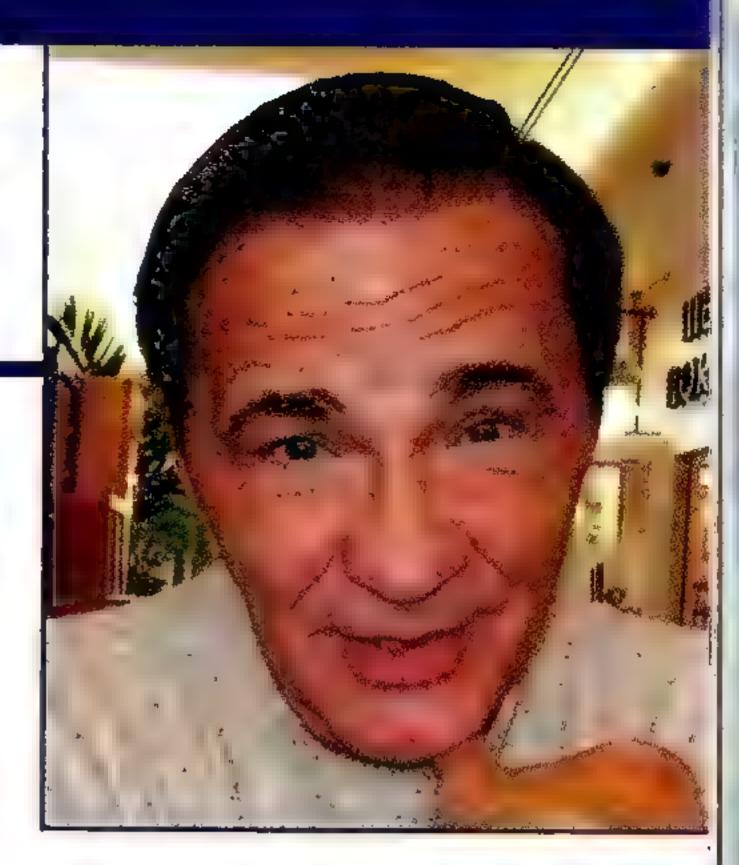
Here I was, this goofy kid, and there was the champion of the world. Then he stood up. I thought, Geez, what have I got myself into? He was in his prime, about 270 pounds. He looked like a gorilla...

still using them 34 years later. They've turned from white to black, though. It's like going from a white belt to a black belt, so now I'm a black lace.

- Q: I understand that you have a date coming up that involves Bruno Sammartino.
- A: Can you believe it? Get this: They want me to wrestle Dominic DeNucci in a town just outside Pittsburgh, and Dom will have Bruno in his corner. Bruno still hates me.
- Q: Considering Dominic De-Nucci's age, you should feel like a young lion again.
- A: Heck, compared to Dominic, I should be wearing a diaper. It should be an interesting night.
- Q: I understand that you grew up in Chicago and moved to Pittsburgh when you were

older. When did you start paying attention to wrestling?

- A: My family moved to Pittsburgh when I was 12. I had only seen wrestling maybe one time when I was a kid in Chicago. But, after we moved to Pittsburgh, I discovered Studio Wrestling, which aired every Saturday night. Bruno was the WWWF champion and there were other big names such as George Steele, Dr. Bill Miller, and Prof. Tanaka. It hit me right away. Wrestling was my destiny.
- Q: And not just pro wrestling. You were quite an amateur wrestler in high school, weren't you? Even a state champion?
- A: Yes. I think that's why Bruno liked me. I had a good amateur run in high school, and I wrestled during my first year at



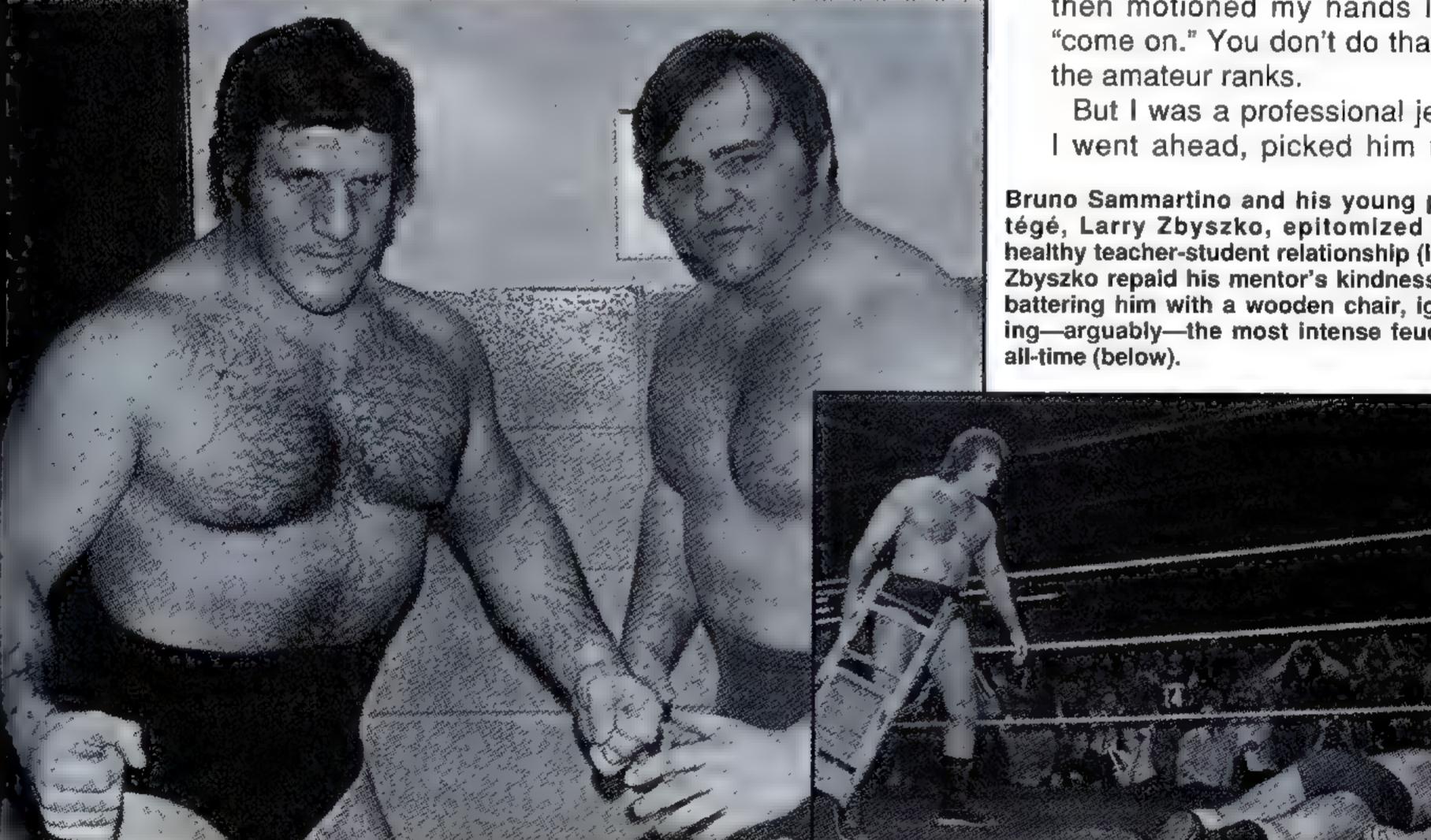
Penn State. But that turned out to be a disaster.

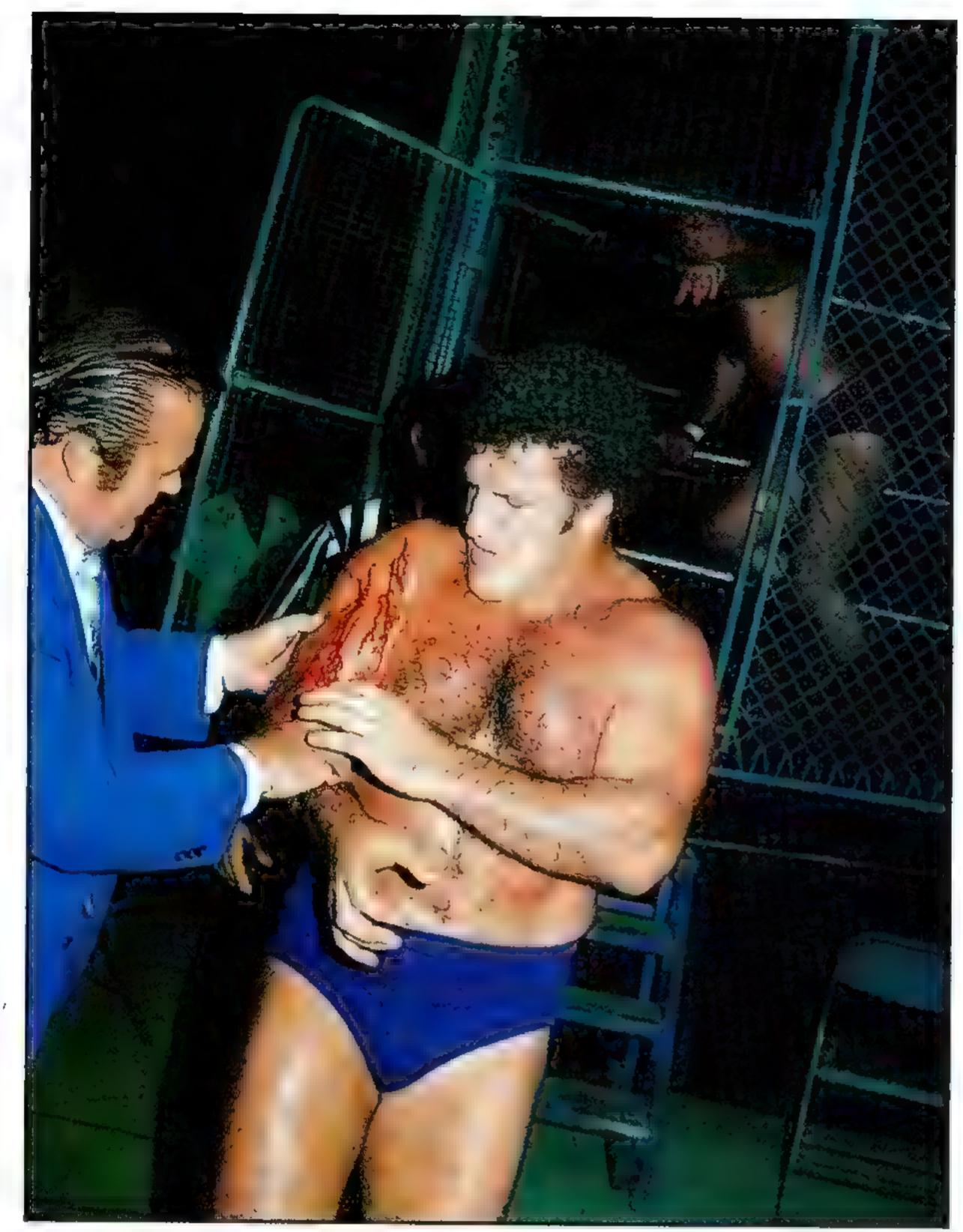
Q: What happened?

A: At one meet, I was angry because the team had lost before it was my turn to go on the mat. I wrestled at 191 pounds, so I was the heavyweight and went last. So, I was really angry, and took my opponent down to the mat. I put him on his back, the ref went down for the count, and I jumped up and let him go, and then motioned my hands like "come on." You don't do that in the amateur ranks.

But I was a professional jerk. I went ahead, picked him up,

Bruno Sammartino and his young protégé, Larry Zbyszko, epitomized the healthy teacher-student relationship (left). Zbyszko repaid his mentor's kindness by battering him with a wooden chair, igniting-arguably-the most intense feud of all-time (below).





The Zbyszko-Sammartino feud culminated inside a steel cage at the WWF's Showdown At Shea, a forerunner to modern-day supercards and pay-per-views. Bruno is the bloody victor, but Zbyszko clearly wants some more.

put him on his back, and let him up again. So, both teams got up, the coaches were screaming, and my old man was screaming. Both teams were on the edge of the mat, ready to dive across and fight each other. I didn't care, though. I didn't want to be in college anyway. The only reason I went was so I wouldn't have to go to Vietnam. Yeah, I almost started a riot.

Q: That must have been the first guy you took to Larryland. When you decided that you wanted to be a pro wrestler, how did you go about finding Bruno?

A: When I was 16, I was a big

wrestling fan and had just got my license. Bruno lived just a couple of miles down the street. I always drove past his house just to catch a glimpse of him. I was a real stalker.

One day, I was driving by and, through these big hedges, I saw Bruno near his pool in his backyard. He looked like he was getting a sun tan and was playing catch with his son, David, who was just a little kid. So, I stopped right there, jumped out of the car, and busted through his hedges. He turned around and looked at me like, What the hell? Here I was, this goofy kid, and there was the champion of the world.

Then he stood up. I thought, *Geez*, what have I got myself into? He was in his prime, about 270 pounds. He looked like a gorilla. I introduced myself, told him I was 16. He was very kind to me. We struck up a friendship first, and we didn't get into a teacher-student relationship until later. The rest is history.

Q: According to what I've heard, he wanted you to get a diploma before he would train you for wrestling.

A: That's right. He wanted me to graduate from college because he knew that wrestling works out great for some, but for most guys it doesn't go anywhere. He wanted me to have something to fall back on if the wrestling didn't work out or I got hurt. There's no benefits in wrestling to this day, and, back then, there were no contracts and no guaranteed money. It could be here today, gone tomorrow.

Q: How did you get along with his wife and son?

A: Carol, his wife, was very, very nice. She was very pleasant all the time, and put up with this 16-year-old kid always hanging around. David was young, only about three or four years old at the time.

Q: Did you feel like part of the family?

A: I didn't really hang out with the family that much. I just worked out with Bruno most of the time. Once in a while, they'd have a cookout or something like that. But Bruno was the nicest guy you'd ever want to meet. I think my amateur background impressed him, and he probably appreciated the fact that I was very respectful.

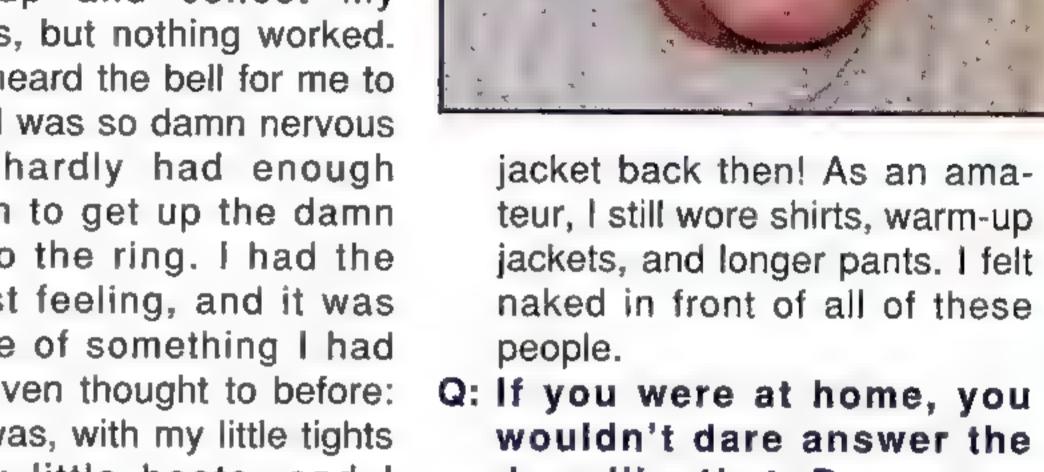
This was a very unique situation. In those days, the guys didn't want you in the business. There were no training schools, and, if you asked someone to train you, they'd beat you up. For a guy like Bruno—the biggest star of that era—to

I learned from the greats, such as Chief Jay Strongbow, Gorilla Monsoon, and Arnold Skoaland. In fact, all of McMahon's agents and top guys were very nice to me and went out of their way to educate me. They felt it was good politics to help Bruno's protégé.

take me under his wing, it was a great honor.

- Q: What was his personality like? Did he have a good sense of humor?
- A: Bruno was a riot. He was a fun, straight-shootin' guy. He was from an old-school Italian family whose word was their contract. He said what he meant, and he respected those who meant what they said. If you were a lying phony, he wouldn't deal with you ... but he'd make sure you knew it.
- Q: When was your first match?
- A: In a little high school outside of Pittsburgh. It was wintertime

and they wanted me to go out first. I got nervous, so I went out second instead. I tried to warm up and collect my thoughts, but nothing worked. Then I heard the bell for me to go out. I was so damn nervous that I hardly had enough strength to get up the damn steps to the ring. I had the weirdest feeling, and it was because of something I had never given thought to before: Here I was, with my little tights and my little boots, and I walked into gymnasium with everybody wearing coats and hats. I didn't even wear a ring



- wouldn't dare answer the door like that. Do you remember what year that was?
- A: 1973.
- Q: Who was your opponent?
- A: Tony DiPaulo. He was a Canadian guy who often wrestled in the Pittsburgh and New York areas.
- Q: Did he beat you in your first match?
- A: No, I beat him.
- Q: Really? You didn't have to pay your dues first?
- A: I was Bruno's protégé, brother. For the other guy, it was just an honor to wrestle Bruno's student. Remember, Bruno's protégé couldn't look bad, because it would reflect on Bruno. It's a start in this business that most guys never get.
- Q: Was that match for the WWWF?
- A: No, that was for the Pittsburgh territory. Bruno owned the Pittsburgh territory, and that's why it had a relationship with the WWWF. He bought the territory from one of the Mongols and eventually sold it to Newton Tattrie. Then the McMahons took it over.



Liter turning heel, Zbyszko went after every veteran in the WWF, including Dominic DeNucci. Incredibly, DeNucci is still angry with Zbyszko and has challenged him to a match in 2007!



Still riding the momentum of his feud with Bruno, Zbyszko headed south to Georgia, where he captured the National heavyweight title in a tournament—only a few weeks after attempting to buy the championship for \$25,000.

Q: When did you begin wrestling for Vince McMahon Sr.?

A: In late-1973. Bruno told Mc-Mahon that he had found a kid that he liked and that he wanted to bring him in as his protégé. Of course, McMahon said, "Yessir."

Q: is there anyone else you learned from back then?

A: I had a very blessed apprenticeship in the wrestling business because of Bruno. Ordinarily, most guys wouldn't tell you anything because they didn't want you to take their jobs—and they didn't want people from the outside smartening up. Those veterans really protected the business, even against young guys who were already part of it.

Because I was Bruno's pro-

tégé, I learned from the greats, such as Chief Jay Strongbow, Gorilla Monsoon, and Arnold Skoaland. In fact, all of Mc-Mahon's agents and top guys were very nice to me and went out of their way to educate me. They felt it was good politics to help Bruno's protégé.

Q: What is the best advice that anyone gave you?

A: Oh, my God, Harry, that was a long time ago. I paid attention to the guys who were successful—such as Strongbow, George Steele, Ivan Koloff, and Billy Graham—and watched how they went about getting over or nearly cause riots. I also stole a little from Bruno, in terms of how he got credibility with the fans, and combined all of that into my approach.

Q: You were a fan favorite for several years, and held the WWWF tag team belts with Tony Garea. Were you still learning and evolving at that time, or did you feel the urge to break out and do something different, like turn heel?

A: No, not really. I was thrilled with starting off as Bruno's protégé. That instantly made me a beloved figure. Besides, it takes years to become a great professional. So I coasted along, kept my mouth shut, and watched the other guys. I realized I was learning when I was able to critique my own work. When that happened, I made the dramatic jump from a mediocre, beloved kid to a top guy—and I had to stab Bruno in the back to do it.

Q: You turning on Bruno is the classic wrestling angle. Take me back to that period. What was the pacing like? Did you slowly tease the viewers week after week, or did you take people by surprise?

A: One reason it was such a classic is because it took everybody by surprise. We faked them out. In retrospect, they should have seen it coming. It was a combination of people not knowing it was coming, and also taking what they love and twisting it around. That's why they were so angry when it happened. That is a classic swerve. They don't know how to do that today. It was so believable you had to believe it.

Q: You turned against a legend.
What kind of heat was on you by the time you faced him in front of 40,000 fans?
What was it like to walk down the street?

A: It was incredible. After I turned against Bruno, I was stabbed, had cars smashed, and even got death threats from Little Italy. I couldn't go anyplace. People would throw rocks at my car. People would try to run me off the road. They hated my guts.

After I turned against Bruno, I was stabbed, had cars smashed, and even got death threats from Little Italy. couldn't go anyplace. People would throw rocks at my car. People would try to run me off the road. They hated my guts.

Q: What was it like in Shea Stadium that day?

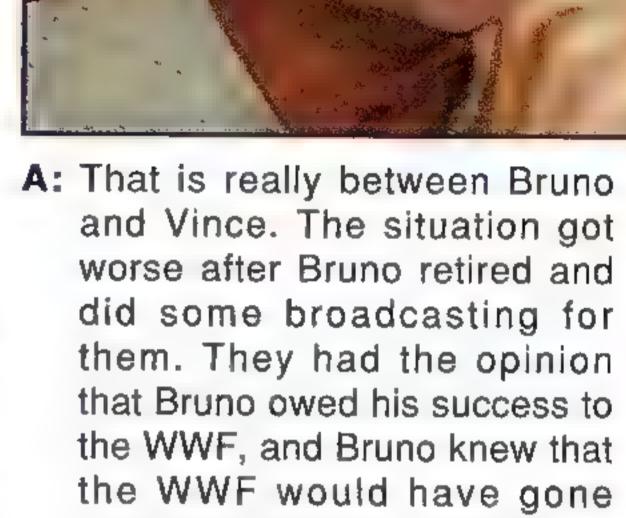
- a dugout and see all those people for a wrestling match in 1980 was unheard of. There was a behind-the-scenes struggle between Bruno and the McMahons because the McMahons didn't believe in what we were doing. In the end, though, we sold out Shea Stadium and turned thousands of people away [actually, Shea Stadium holds 55,000 people—ed.]
- Q: Considering the success of that angle, was there any A: It goes way back. I was never



- A: Unbelievable. Just to look out of A: The problem was that Bruno and the McMahons were always feuding. Bruno had no respect for them whatsoever. When he dealt with them, it was his way or the highway. And I think that's why the McMahons loved Bob Backlund so much. They wanted a champion they could control.
 - Q: So this feud between Bruno and the McMahons goes way back? You're saying that it's not a recent development.

going to be their champion because Bruno was my mentor and we had spited them by pulling off this big money-making match. They liked the money, but not the fact that we were proven right. I was Bruno's boy, so the McMahons knew they couldn't control me, either. Who wanted to see Backlund with the WWF belt after Bruno?

Q:What do you think of Bruno's current relationship with WWE? Do you think he will ever work with the Mc-Mahons again?



would be no empire today. Q: There's been a lot of speculation about your relationship with WWE. Apart from the fact that your history is intertwined with Bruno's, there really isn't any reason why you wouldn't qualify for the Hall of Fame. How would you characterize your relationship with the Mc-Mahons?

bankrupt without him and there

A: I'm sure Vince doesn't like me because of all those things that happened years ago. Plus, I'm not WWE's cup of tea, either. You really have to kiss butts there, and I'm not that kind of guy.

Q: I remember you had a legal issue with the WWF back when Chris Jericho was using the "Living Legend" nickname. You threatened to sue the WWF. What happened with that?

A: Nothing wound up happening. The WWF's ratings were dropping and they were grasping at straws to make Chris mean



The Larry Zbyszko-Bruno Sammartino feud was the classic, but the Zbyszko-David Sammartino feud might have been even more violent down in Georgia. David got a little bloodied hile defending his dad's honor.





Zbyszko tries to neutralize the much larger Sgt. Slaughter with an abdominal stretch. The two stars, both of whom gained their greatest fame in the WWF, battled over the Americas title in the AWA during much of 1985.

more than he did. They called him the "Living Legend." So, I called Jim Ross and asked what they were doing. I told Jim, "Since you don't seem to have anything else going for you, I'll come up and wrestle Jericho and teach him a lesson." Their lawyers sent me a letter stating they were taking the nickname, and I had a lawyer send a letter back. In the end, they just quit calling Jericho the "Living Legend."

- Q: Why exactly did you leave the WWF? Was it a general dissatisfaction with the way things were going or did you want to try something new?
- A: There was a lot of heat between me and the McMahons, but I also wanted to try other territories.

- Q: Aside from the Bruno situation, you were involved in another angle that ranks as one of the most memorable of all-time. That took place in Georgia, where you bought the National title for \$25,000. Is that one of your favorite angles?
- A: [Laughs] I loved it! It was my idea. It had never been done before. The fans really liked Paul Orndorff, so why not deprive him of the title through a dirty stunt? When I bought that belt, it really angered those Georgia fans.
- Q: Of course, the WWF had a similar angle several years later when "The Million-Dollar Man" Ted DiBiase bought the WWF title.

- A: People have been stealing my ideas for years.
- Q: Was it difficult to make the transition to Georgia and the NWA from New York and the WWF?
- A: I found it exciting at the time. Aside from touring Japan a couple of times, I had spent the first seven years of my career up in the Northeast. In those days, runs never did last that long, so I was anxious to go somewhere else. Even when I went down to Georgia and the Carolinas, I still got heat from the Bruno thing. That carried me for 20 years!
- Q: You eventually went to the AWA, where you feuded with Sgt. Slaughter. What are your memories of that series of matches?
- A: They were very easy, psychologically, because people hated me and they loved Sgt. Slaughter and all that G.I. Joe stuff.
- Q: It was at that point that I started noticing your stalling tactics. Sometimes, I didn't think you were ever going to lock up.
- A: Someone actually timed me at 16 minutes. I did that to distinguish myself from all the bodybuilders, like The Road Warriors, who did nothing but clotheslines. If I went to the ring and jumped into the action right away, then it would be like every other match that night. I still had so much heat from the Bruno days, and I knew how to carry it. And it's not as if the people were just sitting there. They were chanting "You suck" and cussing me out. When something finally did happen, they went wild.
- Q: So you took real pride in being a heel.
- A: Absolutely. Lou Thesz once gave me the greatest compliment. He said, "Larry, you're the best wrestling heel I've ever seen."

 That sums it up: I was a wrestling heel. I got heat by wrestling and

When I started in the AWA in '85, all the spy movies were out and everybody was afraid of the Soviet Union. Verne [Gagne] was competing with Vince [McMahon] and every other territory at the time. And Verne became convinced that Vince had the office bugged.

didn't depend on an ugly manager or a beautiful valet.

- Q: That's quite a compliment, considering that it came from a legend who had seen everyone going back to Farmer Burns. You're also known for your strong promos. Who influenced you, either in or outside of wrestling?
- A: It's just a natural gift from God. It really happened overnight because of the Bruno thing. Before that, I was just a nice kid who gave humble interviews. All of a sudden, I had to go from that to being the most hated wrestler in the world. Fortunately, I was good enough to pull it off. Remember, I said things about Bruno that no one had ever dared say before, talking about his age and how he should retire. No wonder everybody hated me.
- Q: Where did you get the term "spudhead"?
- A: I came up with that in Minnesota. I had an appointment with someone at this company. When I got there, nobody was in the whole office building. It looked like there had been, a bomb threat. I was peeved because I had driven a long way to get there. The secretary said, "There was an emergency. There's a frost coming and everybody had to go home to cover their potatoes." I couldn't believe what I was hearing. I said, "What a bunch of spudheads!" I used it from then on.
- Q: It was during that time that you had a feud with Nick Bockwinkel. He was different

from Bruno in terms of style, but he was another legend you took delight in retiring.

- A: He was one of the last oldschool wrestlers. He was smooth and those matches were easy. We always had a helluva match. The crowd always went nuts.
- Q: You also introduced some martial arts into your repertoire at that time. I understand that you had some legitimate martial arts training. How long were you involved in that?



A: I went into martial arts training when I was younger, between wrestling seasons. It helped me with coordination. To get a black belt in Isshinryu karate, you had to do weapons katas, which could include a bow, a



Eager to retire another legend, Zbyszko went after Nick Bockwinkel with a bloodlust. His sadistic use of a pair of nunchakus on the former AWA World champion set the tone for their violent rivalry. Randy Orton should be envious of Zbyszko's legend-killing ability.



After defeating Barry Windham for the Western States Heritage title in Jim Crockett Promotions, Zbyszko immediately targeted Dusty Rhodes (above). Zbyszko's valet, Baby Doll, claimed to have incriminating photos of Rhodes, and the contents of her envelope remained a mystery ... until now (inset).

long stick, or little dagger swords that spin around, but I never liked any of them. But I loved nunchakus. I could put them in a suitcase, right in the airplane in those days.

The nunchakus were handy in case some crazy fan tried to jump me. I also used them to warm up before matches. I would spin them around and loosen up my shoulders. One day, I was in the showers and Verne [Gagne] comes in and sees me spinning these things. He said, "What the hell is that?!" I told him they were nunchakus. Verne yelled, "You don't see those every day, dammit! What can you do with those?" I said, "Well, I'm not a Chinese guy, but you can break coconuts and kill people." Later, I broke a coconut and, next thing you know, I put on my old karate gi and Verne had a new super ninja.

Q: How did you like Verne as a boss? Tell me a good Verne story.

A: Verne was a typical old-school promoter. In terms of modern technology, he didn't have a clue. But he was a tough guy

and had a helluva territory, the AWA. When I started in the AWA in '85, all the spy movies were out and everybody was

union. Verne was competing with Vince and every other territory at the time. And Verne became convinced that Vince had the office bugged.

Q: If the KGB did it, why not Vince?

A: That's right. When I went to his office one day, he had Jack Lanza standing on his desk. Jack's a tall guy, and he had pushed the tiles out of the way so he could look into the ceiling. He had a flashlight looking for bugs! He said, "I don't see any bugs up here, Verne." Verne was standing by his desk and said, "I know they're listening to us!" So

Verne's office and then we heard Verne yell, "Jesus Christ!" Then the telephone comes bouncing into the hall-



"I know they're lis- Zbyszko can't stop bragging after regaining the AWA world title from Mr. Saito in 1990. It was during this period that he began referring to fans as "spudheads." He was ever the graceful champion.

"The Crocketts had this idea to put me with Baby Doll. We were supposed to have these secret pictures of Dusty and were going to blackmail him. For years, people have been asking me what was in that envelope!"

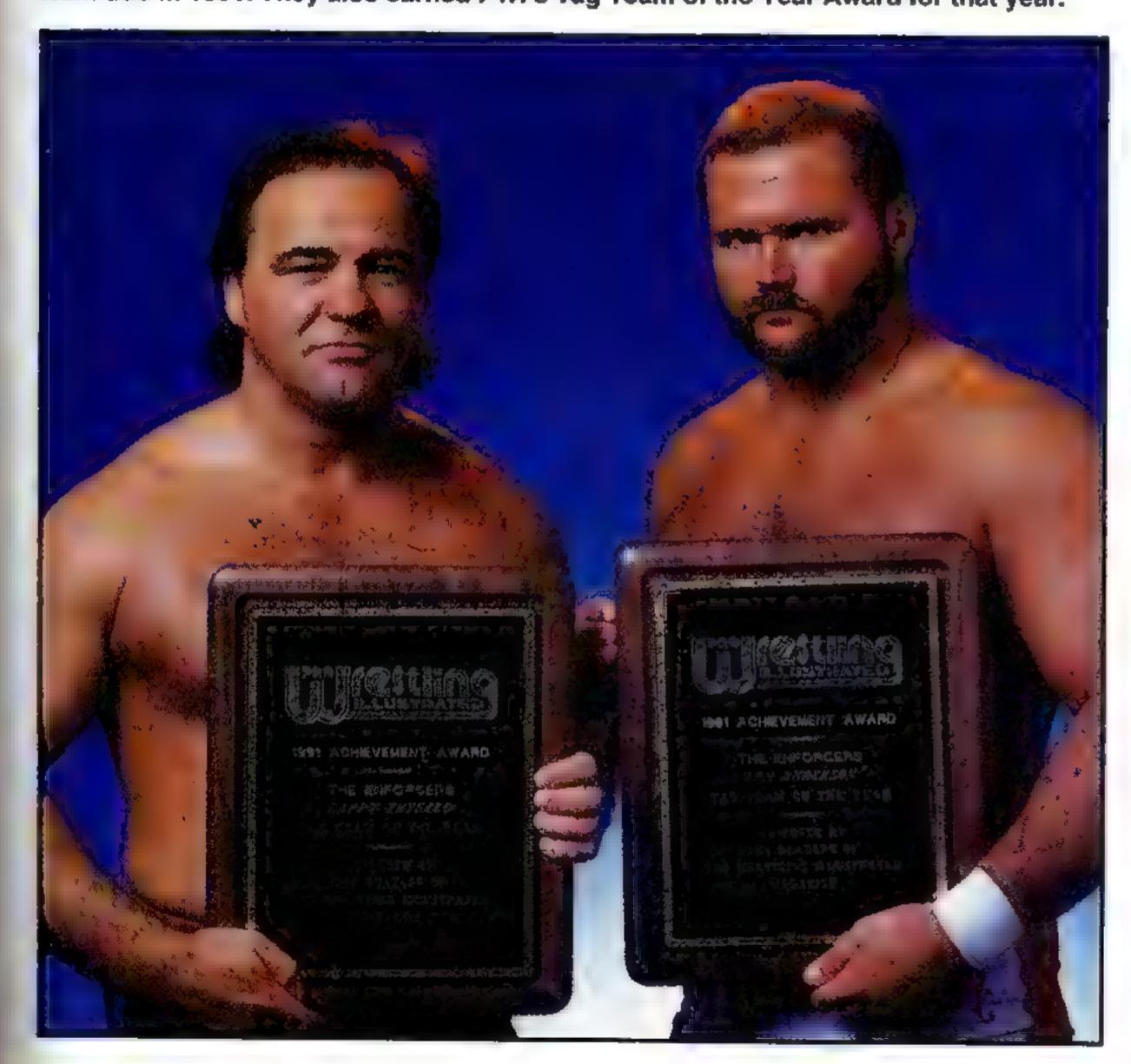
way. Verne came out and asked, "What the hell is that?" He pointed to the phone lying there, and one of those stickon digital clocks had been put on the phone. He thought it was a bug!

- Q: He must have been really convinced that someone was a secret agent there.
- A: Well, listen to this: Shortly after that, who left Verne's company and winds up as a longtime agent for the WWF?
- Q: Jack Lanza?
- A: Jack Lanza! Verne wasn't stupid. He knew information was

- getting out, but he thought it was bugs. The guy who was boking for the bug was the stooge!
- Q: That's the way it always works out in the movies. Speaking of Verne, did you have any trepidation about dating his daughter?
- A: No, not really. Kathy was a cool chick, and we had a great time. The only downside to her was that she was Verne's daughter. I knew people would say I was
- Q: Do you have any sympathy for Triple-H, who also married

trying to get the belt!

The "Living Legend" preferred being a loner for most of his career, staying away from managers, factions, and even tag team partners. The notable exception was his successful partnership with Arn Anderson, with whom he captured the WCW World tag team title in 1991. They also earned PWI's Tag Team of the Year Award for that year.



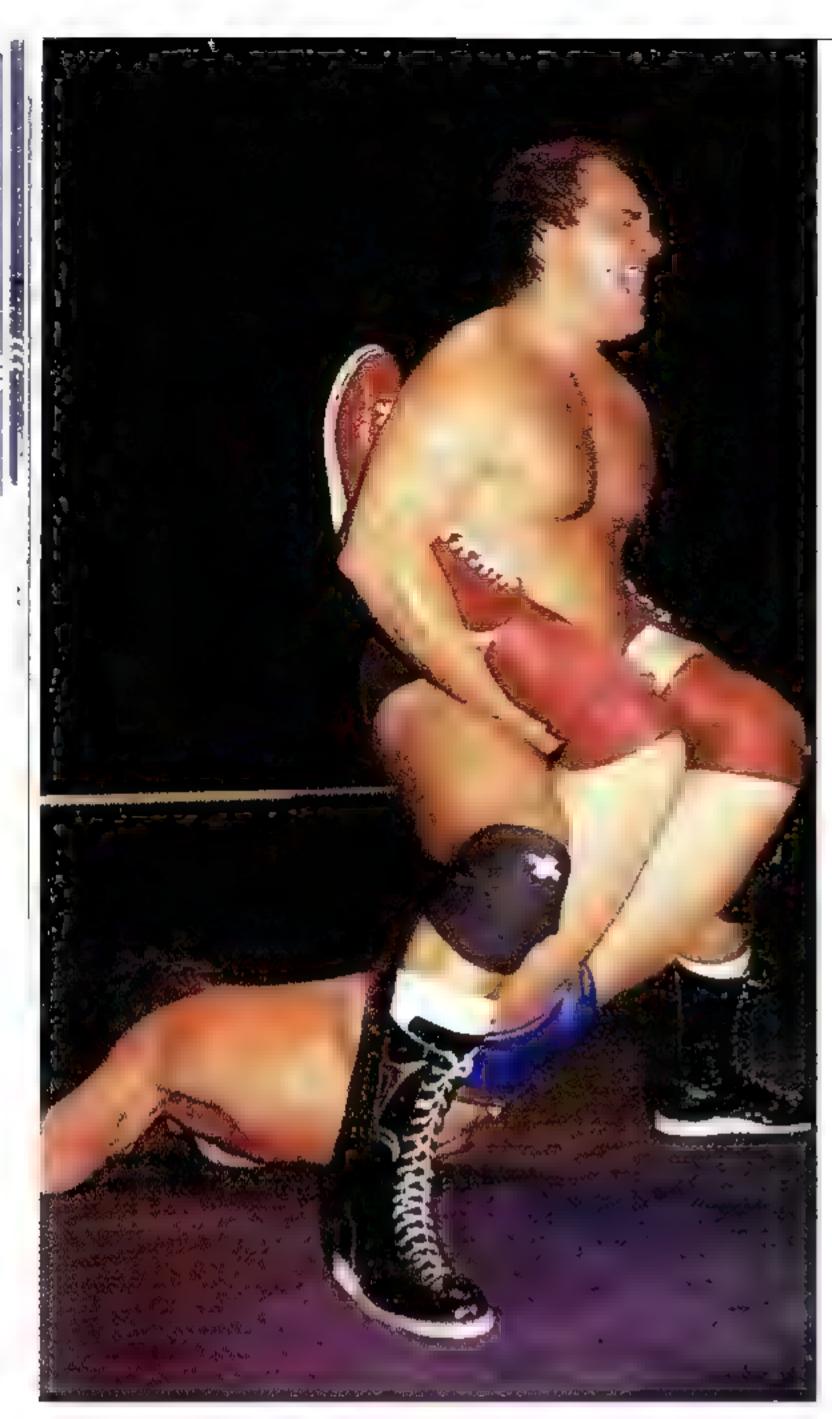


the promoter's daughter?

- A: [Laughs] Only because Vince is his father-in-law! Seriously, as long as they're happy, it doesn't matter. We're all going to die soon, so what's the difference?
- Q: In between your AWA stints, you briefly worked in Jim Crockett Promotions. What did you think of that operation?
- A: Whenever you got down to the southern territories, like Florida or Georgia or the Crockett territory, there often were cliques, usually comprised of Dusty Rhodes, Barry Windham, and some other guys. But, because I got good heat, Dusty and the other guys recognized me for my talent, so we got along good.

Anyway, I decided to take a break from the AWA, and the Crocketts had this idea to put me with Baby Doll. We were supposed to have these secret pictures of Dusty and were going to blackmail him. For years, people have been asking me what was in that envelope!

- Q: Actually, Larry, that was the point of this entire interview, to get to the bottom of this 20-year mystery. What was in that envelope?!
- A: I'll tell you the story. I came into the Crockett promotion and beat Barry Windham for



Even when Zbyszko became an announcer for WCW, he was often lured back into the ring. In 1994, Zbyszko answered Lord Steven Regal's taunts by re-lacing the ol' parachute cords and 3 taking the cocky Brit's TV championship.

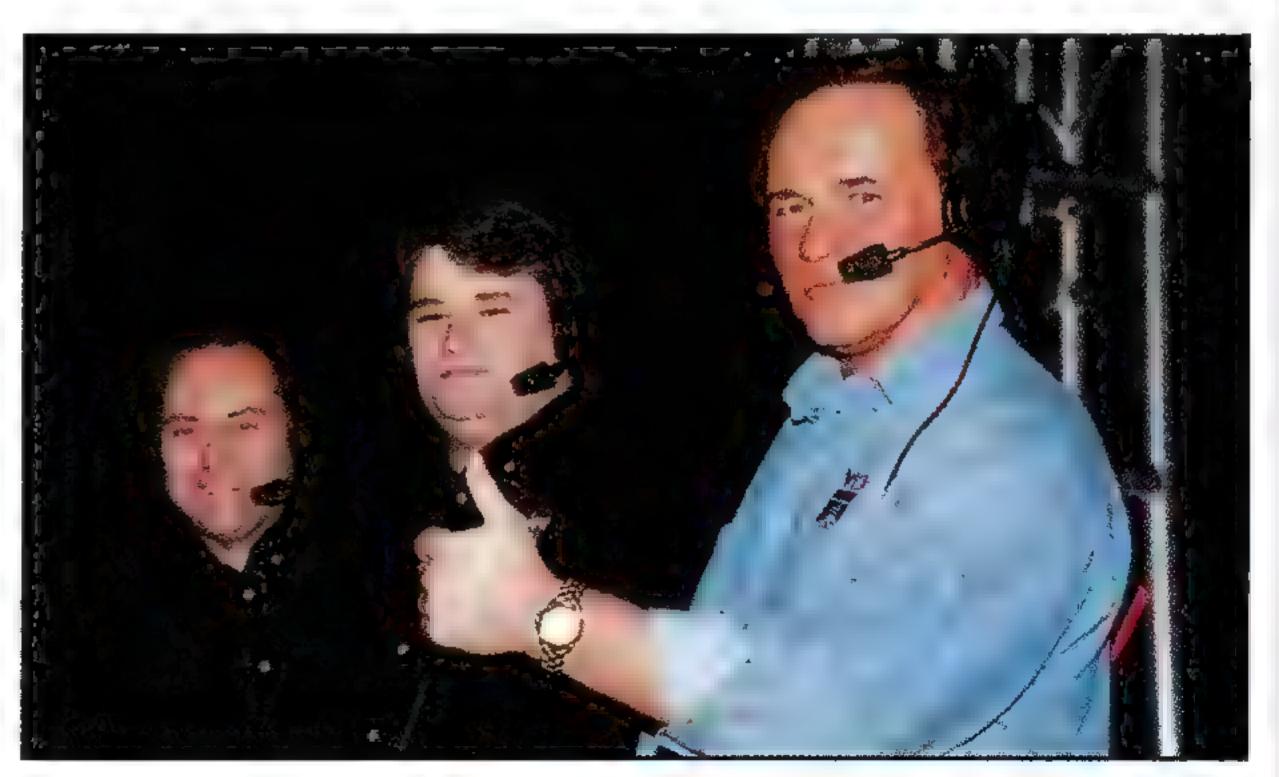
the Western States heritage championship. Then Baby Doll and I did this interview, and we say that we have incriminating photos of Dusty. The Crocketts wanted Baby Doll to give Dusty a big kiss, which would have turned out to be something like the Italian kiss of death. Well, she had just married Sam Houston shortly before this. Why, I'll never know. They were having problems because he didn't like her on the road, and certainly didn't want her kissing Dusty or any of the wrestlers. So she refused to give Dusty this big, juicy kiss of death because she didn't want to start a fight with Sam Houston. The Crocketts didn't like that so they fired her. That angle came to an end, and back to the AWA I went.

- Q: I'm glad I finally have the answer to that question! When you returned to the AWA, you had the distinction of being its last World champion. What was it like being the champion of an organization that had obviously hit hard times?
- A: Not bad. The AWA had its golden era. I just happened to be there at the tail end of the AWA and the territorial era. Actually, Kathy and I, and other people in the family, were trying to get Verne to shut it down a year or two before he actually did.

Besides, I already had an offer from WCW. In fact, we had a meeting with [WCW Executive Vice President] Jim Herd before the AWA shut its doors. Verne and Greg [Gagne] thought the AWA should invade the newly formed WCW on TBS. Sting had the NWA title at the time, and they wanted me to wrestle him

in a title-unification match. It would have worked out great, but someone told Herd, "You've got to be careful because

- Zbyszko could really eat up Sting and make him and WCW look really bad." The idiot! Of course, the kid doing the broadcasting at the time, Eric Bischoff, went on to create the New World Order in the ultimate invasion angle.
- Q: When you joined WCW in the early-1990s, you teamed with Arn Anderson and wrestled guys like Barry Windham and Dustin Rhodes. Who were your best opponents during that time?
- A: Teaming with Arn was very easy, and we had a real classic with Rick Steamboat and Dustin Rhodes. We also had great matches with Rick and Scott Steiner, and with Rick Steiner and Bill Kazmaier. I wish our run as The Enforcers could have lasted longer, but it was a weird time in WCW politics.
- Q: I know what you mean. This was the same era when Turner Broadcasting wouldn't let WCW announcers use the term "foreign object" because CNN didn't allow the word "foreign" in its broadcasts. Instead, they were called "international objects."
- A: It got so stupid! Don't get me started on the long list of WCW executives who didn't know anything about wrestling.



As a broadcast colleague of Mike Tenay and Tony Schiavone on WCW Monday Nitro, Zbyszko was a familiar face—and voice—during wrestling's boon period of the late-1990s. He defends the much-maligned Schiavone as being a smooth professional.

The New World Order ended prematurely because of prima donnas and a lack of leadership. But Vince Russo and Ed Ferrara absolutely killed WCW. When the people are chanting 'Gold-berg' and your writer is the World champion, it's time to pack your bags."

Q: Why did you become an announcer? Did you want to stop being a wrestler or were you forced behind the mike?

A: I had been in the Dangerous Alliance for a brief period, but I don't like the groups. Bill Watts started preaching that everybody over 40 was useless. That really meant "I'm pushing my kid, Erik!" So Bill was running amuck and my knee was sore, so I decided to take a break and have my knee scoped. One day, a TBS guy came to me and said, "We hope your knee is feeling bet-

Would you mind doingsome voiceovers?" That wasn't a problem, so I went down and voiced over a couple of shows. The same guy came running back and said it was the best broadcasting he'd ever heard! They liked me so much that they got rid of Jesse [Ventura] and offered me a deal.

Q: You and Tony Schiavone were broadcast partners for a long time. Did you feel that you two had good chemistry?

A: Tony was easy to work with,

and I had a good time with him. I was a natural, so I didia good job with everybody.

O: That wasn't the end of your wrestling career, though. You made a memorable comeback to beat Steven Regal for the TV title. And, later, you had the back-and-forth with Scott Hall and Eric Bischoff. Were you flattered that bookers kept trying to find ways to get you back in the ring?

A: First, they didn't know what to do with Lord Steven Regal, who was an old-school character with the aristocrat gimmick. But he knew how to wrestle, and he wanted to make his reputation at my expense. It was the opposite of my feud with Bruno. Also, I

wanted to show the people at TBS how to take a low rating during the May sweeps, the hardest time of the year to draw good ratings, and make it a great rating.

Later, when the New World Order came along, I saw the opportunity to program some schtick with Eric Bischoff and Scott Hall. Those two pay-perviews where I wrestled the New World Order turned out to be the highest buy rates WCW ever did.

Q: Aside from spending money, what did WCW do right?

A: For a while, they stuck to the traditional aspects of wrestling. That helped in the long run because that's why fans got behind WCW, this struggling underdog, in the war with the WWF. So, when the NWO invaded, the WCW wrestlers were already set up as the good guys. The more you stick to tradition, the better off you're going to be.

Q: What was the moment you realized that WCW was going out of business?

A: The New World Order ended prematurely because of prima donnas and a lack of leadership. But
Vince Russo and Ed Ferrara
absolutely killed WCW. When
the people are chanting "Goldberg" and your writer is the
World champion, it's time to pack
your bags.



Dyszko was an important part of WCW's biggest payper-view ever, Starrcade 1997. Bret Hart, making his
WCW debut as a special referee that night, can hardly
restrain the "Living Legend" in his match against
WCW Senior Vice President Eric Bischoff. Hart kayos
Sischoff, giving Zbyszko the victory.



It's the feud that never dies! Sammartino, not known for forgetting grudges, agreed to be in Dallas Page's corner in his match against Zbyszko in 2005. Zbyszko didn't hesitate to send his 70-year-old mentor back to Larryland at the WrestleReunion event in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania.

Q: How would you compare the TNA locker room to the old WWWF locker room? I imagine TNA's guys playing video games, and the old WWWF guys smoking, drinking, and carousing.

A: I don't really hang around the kids in the TNA locker room because I'm not a wrestler anymore. But, sure, they love playing video games, doing calisthenics, and spraying themselves with water for no reason. These guys can't wrestle unless they have a little spray bottle of water. In the old days, we just sat around, smoked cigarettes, and played poker. Then we'd wrestle our match and come back to the poker table.

Q: I have to ask you about your favorite pastime away from wrestling—golf!

A: Ah!

Q: Do you play professionally?

A: Last year, I played in the Hooters Senior Series and the



In the ring with announcer Mike Tenay, Zbyszko lays down the law as TNA's straight-shooting director of authority. Unfortunately, Zbyszko became a bit too cozy with then-NWA champion Jeff Jarrett, which ultimately led to his downfall.

Sunbelt Senior Tour in the Carolinas. I've been busy lately, so I haven't had time for the tours, but I still play a lot.

Q: How would you explain the attraction of golf to someone like me, a person who has never played before?

A: It's a horrible sport. Don't get involved! Golf is the most frustrating, stupid sport that man ever invented. You hit this ball really far with this stick and there's all kinds of silly rules. I just happen to be good at it because I've had so much spare time to devote to it. When I was in broadcasting, that only kept me busy for less than two days a week. I started playing golf to get out of the house, away from Kathy. I live on the golf course.

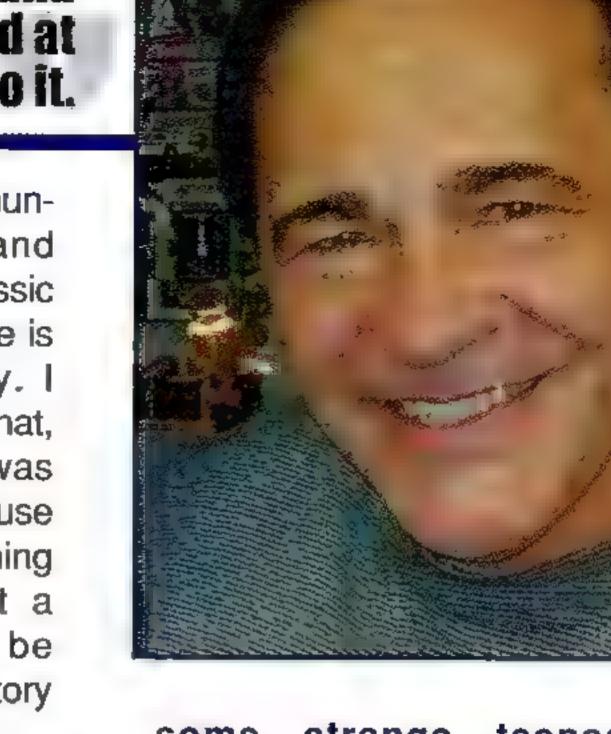
Q: I understand that you're

Golf is the most frustrating, stupid sport that man ever invented. You hit this ball really far with this stick and there's all kinds of silly rules. I just happen to be good at it because I've had so much spare time to devote to it.

working on your autobiography, which will be out this fall. Do you know the title of your book yet?

- A: Remember those old posters with Superman standing above the planet? I envisioned "Adventures In Larryland" in those big, block letters. But that's only a tentative title. Other than Mick Foley, I don't think too many wrestlers have attempted to really write their own books. But I'm doing it.
- Q: What kind of experience has that been for you? Has it been easy to remember the details of your life?
- A: Most of my life has been mundane, a lot of traveling and catching planes. But the classic stuff you never forget. My life is a dream-come-true story. I wanted to be like my hero. That, of course, was Bruno. It was easy to write the book because I didn't have to make anything up. Even if you weren't a wrestling fan, you'd still be engulfed in this story. It's a story about not being normal.
- Q: What will we find out that we didn't know before?
- A: That I'm a nice guy!

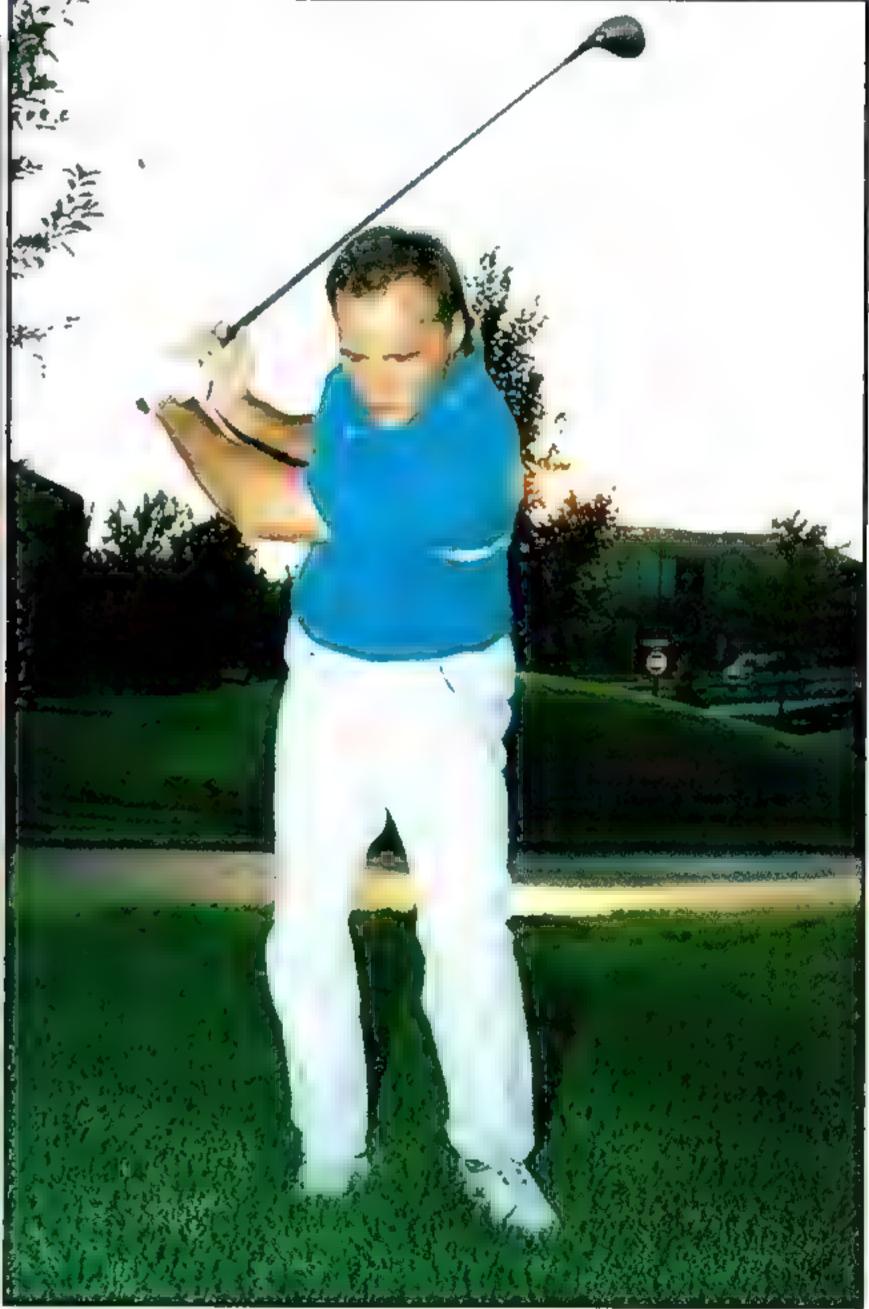
Q: One final question: What would you do if



some strange teenager popped out of the bushes in your backyard and wanted to become your protégé?

A: I would tell him to get a job!





TNA official Jim Cornette forced Zbyszko into a "Loser Gets Fired" match against Eric Young at Bound for Glory (left). And the result of the match? Let's just say that Zbyszko has more time to perfect his golf swing (right).

MIGSIGIANALYSIS:

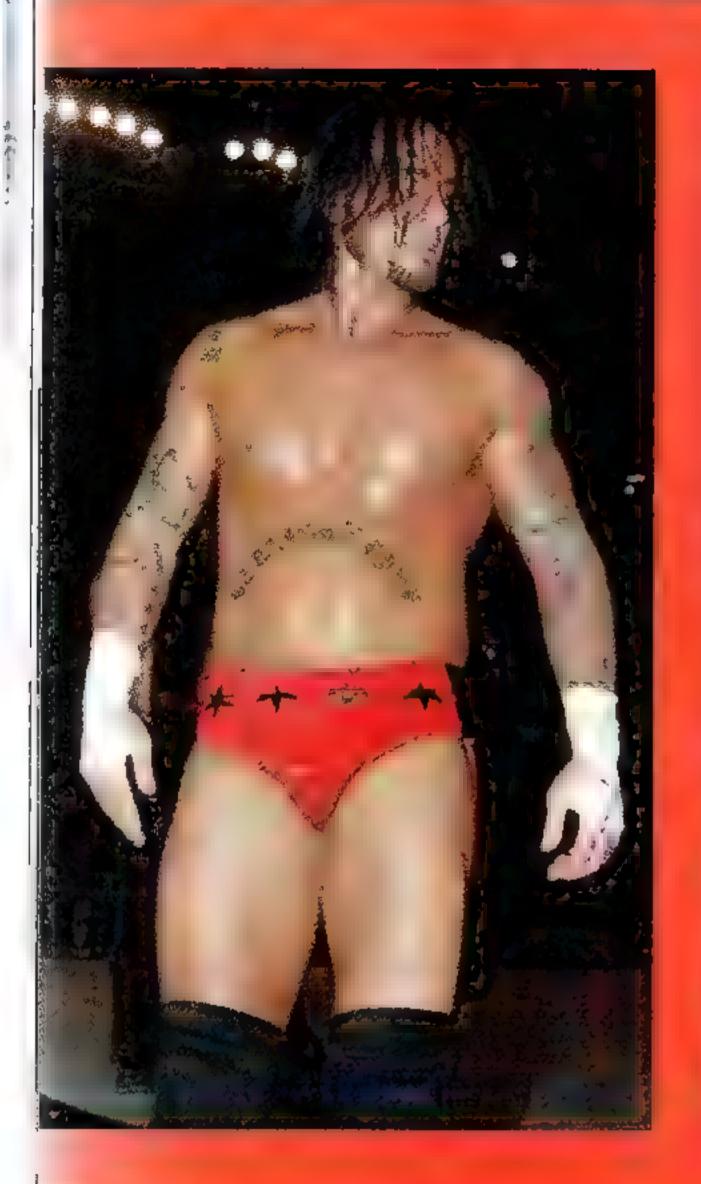
Vince McMahon has a plan for ECW.

It involves new faces, new names, and new rules. He's taken a lot of heat from the press and the fans, but did anyone even consider that he just might know what he's doing?

By Kevin McElvaney

MAGINE PAUL HEYMAN'S reaction if someone had told him, back in 2001. I that ECW would make its return to television in 2006. Not only that, but the company's title would be held, for five







Indy darling C.M. Punk (above left) gained immediate popularity with the ECW audience, while WWE veterans such as Test (above right) had to prove themselves worthy of the hardcore brand. Some fans never accepted Test as a hardcore star, which was perhaps one more reason for his 2007 release.

months, by The Big Show, who would defend it against stars such as The Undertaker, Kane, and Ric Flair. Countouts and disqualifications would be standard, and Bob "Hardcore" Holly would be maineventing instead of Sabu. How hard do you think they man would have been laughing?

We can rub our eyes in disbelief, but why should any of us be surprised by the direction of Vince McMahon's ECW? After all, ECW under the WWE banner was bound to be different than the renegade outfit that could barely pay its bills.

A lot has changed between 2001 and 2006. Many of the heroes of the old ECW have aged and moved on. Others wanted nothing to do with an ECW owned by Vince McMahon. Tommy Dreamer, The Sandman, and Mahoney have done a great job catering to the devoted, old school audience, but basing a promotion around them today would be questionable. McMahon knew, without some changes, the new ECW would be a short-lived, nostalgic cash grab. Sure, the money would have been good while it lasted, but McMahon wanted to ensure ECW's longevity.

With its re-launch, ECW needed new stars. Not just any stars either. McMahon has always believed that, at the core of every great wrestling match, there is a great conflict. Good guys vs. bad guys—a battle as old as time. Vince already had his good guys.

ECW's Originals commanded the respect and adoration of the fans. What he needed were some fresh antagonists.

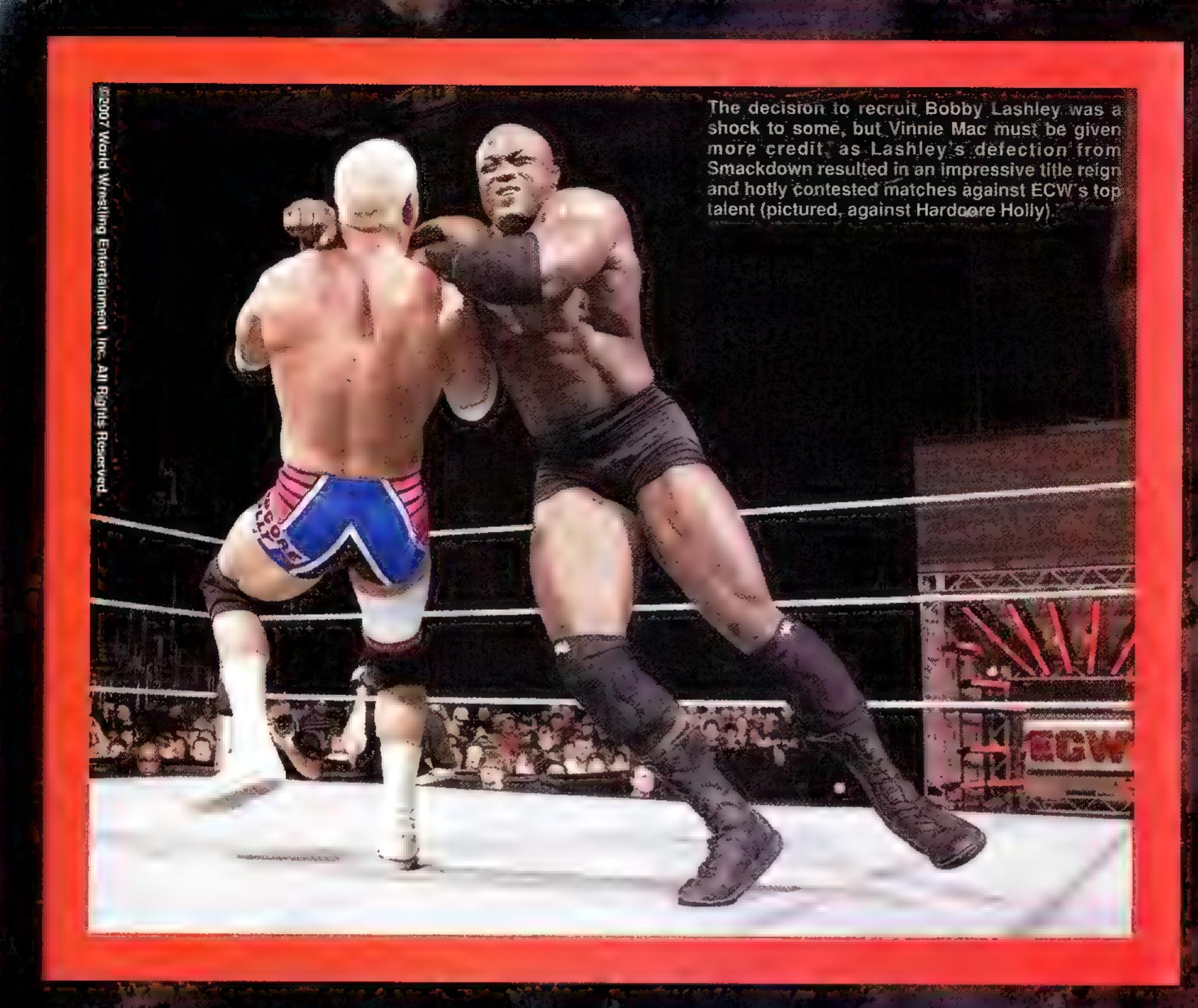
ECW's New Breed of rulebreakers were, for the most part, already under WWE contract. They came from Raw, Smackdown, and WWE's developmental system. Elijah Burke was struggling to make a name for himself on Smackdown, but McMahon chose him as part of his new vision for ECW. "I am looking to make an impact," said Burke. "And if I have to do it at the expense of ECW, then that's fine by me."

Other young stars-tobe, such as WWE developmental wrestlers Mike Knox and Kevin Thorn, saw a chance to grow in ECW and, with McMahon's blessing, seized the opportunity.

"I had been in OVW for a while, and I wondered when my chance was gonna come," confided Thorn. "But I saw my chance was here [in ECW], and no middle-aged has-beens with kendo sticks are gonna stop me now."

Marcus Cor Von—who appeared under his real name of Monty Brown in TNA—agrees with Thorn. "There's a lot of opportunity here," said Cor Von. "I've been dominant elsewhere, and I guarantee you ECW will be no different." Vince McMahon is equally confident in Cor Von. He sees him as a talent on the rise and a major part of ECW's future.

If ECW is a training ground for bright young prospects, why were Test and Hardcore Holly brought in? One word: Lashley. On the post-Royal Rumble edition of Raw, as seven of WWE's greatest stood in the ring, McMahon chose to single out the ECW champion. He suggested that The Undertaker and Shawn Michaels were demanding title shots at Smackdown World champion Batista and Raw World champion John Cena, respectively, because Bobby Lashley might be the toughest champion of the WWE brands. McMahon handpicked Holly and Test as Lashley's top challengers because they are experienced and have the contempt of ECW fans. Against Holly and Test, Lashley would be able to grow as an in-ring performer, a fan favorite, and a champion.



Unfortunately, Lashley has been thrust into the spotlight at the expense of many deserving wresters. Among them are ECW originals Rob Van Dam and Sabu. These two extreme innovators have proven to be liabilities outside the ring, and until they earn back McMahon's trust, they aren't likely to receive very many title shots. "I don't feel sorry for mem," said New Breed member Matt Striker. "People are much more interested in a young, intelligent man, such as myself."

Striker may seem like a misfit in ECW, but he's actually perfect for the roster. Striker was a talented independent wrestler who came to WWE with a gimmick based on his previous career as a teacher. Despite his strong promos and in-ring abilities, he was ast in WWE's large talent pool—until he defected to ECW. If Matt Striker isn't the modern-day Shane Douglas, then who is?

Another controversial figure in ECW is C.M. Punk. Punk is a throwback, and a favorite of traditional ECW as. He's a charismatic rebel with tremendous techniability. Still, a recent string of losses have fans

wondering if Vince McMahon truly appreciates Punk. Does he know that he has a potential main-eventer on his hands?

After hearing the loud ovations Punk received at December to Dismember and Survivor Series. McMahon realized what he had. "Vince is always careful about not giving guys their shine too soon," said a backstage source. "He knows talent when he sees it, but he wants to make sure his guys stay humble. Punk's time will definitely come. The fans just need to be patient."

The talent featured isn't the only complaint about the new ECW. Most notably, fans lament the fact that the style of wrestling is not as hardcore as it once was. The best explanation for this is that Vince sees ECW as an investment. If his wrestlers take too many risks and get injured, then his investment is ruined. ECW fans should keep in mind that, while the product is much different, it is a work in progress. Vince McMahon knows precisely what he wants from ECW and, in time, fans might just come to appreciate his disciplined approach to WWE's extreme experiment.



As a competitor in ECW, WWE, WCW, and Japan, Mike Awesome made his mark in promotions around the world. His suicide was a shock to the entire wrestling community

AWES ONE

1965-2007

"His Last Name Said It All"

By Jake Black

N FEBRUARY 17, 2007, tragedy struck wrestling once again. Former ECW World champion Mike Awesome was found hanging in his home, an apparent suicide. He was 42.

Awesome, whose real name was Mike Alfonso, was a huge star in Japan, wrestling as The Gladiator for Frontier Martial Arts Wrestling, capturing the promotion's heavyweight championship, as well as other tag team and singles titles. His violent style made him popular in Asia, and, in 1993, got him noticed by Paul Heyman and ECW.

Indeed, Awesome's time in ECW, which included a resumption of his FMW feud with Masato Tanaka, was his most successful run in the United States. Managed by Judge Jeff Jones, Awesome enjoyed two reigns as ECW World champion in 1999 and 2000, holding the title for a total of seven months. He even held the ECW World tag team title with Raven for six days. In fact, it was Awesome's dominance of ECW that led to one of the most



Awesome first gained fame in Japan's FMW, where—as The Gladiator he teamed with Horace Boulder (Hogan) against teams such as The Headhunters. It's safe to say that The Gladiator is the more aglie big man in this shot.



Aside from The Dudley Boyz, Awesome might have been more fascinated with tables than any other wrestler. When Awesome was ECW World champion, Spike Dudley was one of his frequent victims.

lenge Awesome (now a WCW employee) for the

controversial incidents in wrestling history.

WCW President Eric Bischoff hired Awesome away from ECW while Awesome was still champion. It is widely believed that Bischoff's intention was to have Awesome throw down the ECW belt on a live WCW Monday Nitro. Though Awesome was not under contract to ECW at the time, Heyman threatened an injunction to prevent WCW from besmirch-

ing the ECW name. After much legal wrangling, WCW settled the matter out of court with ECW for a reported six-figure sum.

Then the battle between WCW and ECW became a three-way dance. Vince McMahon allowed Tazz, who was on the WWF roster, to chal-

Does this man look like a sellout? Few fans appreciated how WCW Creative revamped Awesome's image, turning him into "That '70s Guy" and then the "Fat Chick Thriller." But working for WCW was the best way to provide for his family.

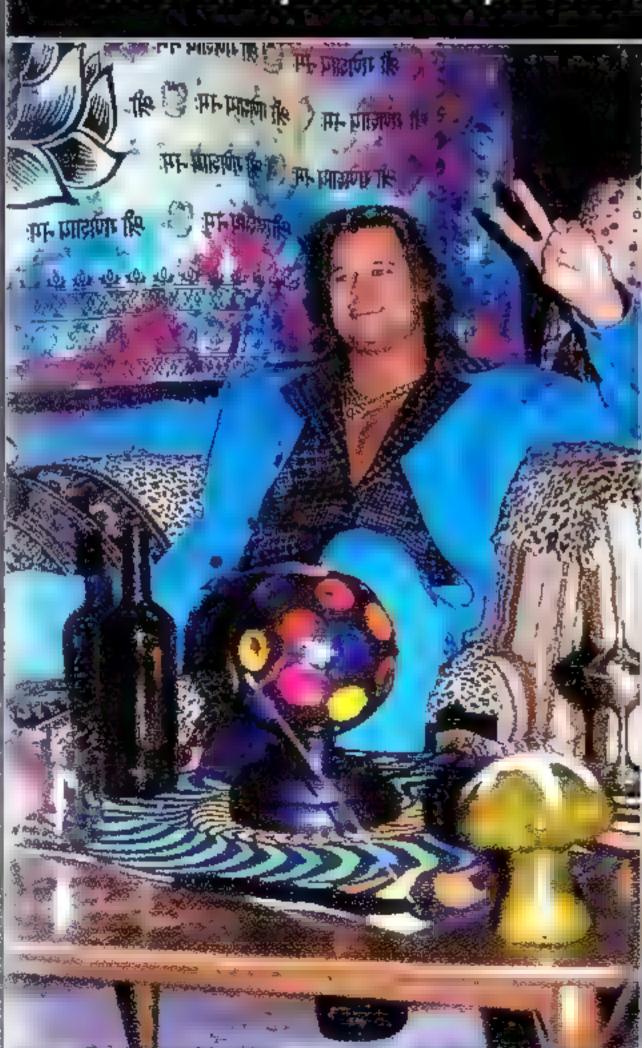
ECW World title. In his final ECW appearance, Awesome dropped the belt to Tazz in less than three minutes. But, back in WCW, things fizzled fast for Awesome. He was booked as "That '70s Guy," and he drove around the country and to the ring in a Partridge

Family-style bus, and he even wrestled in polyester. From there, Awesome developed a fascination with heavy-set women, and he earned the nickname "Fat Chick Thriller." Loyal ECW fans, who believed Awesome was a sellout, thought this was poetic justice. Awesome, however, never complained. He had made the decision to jump to WCW to provide for his family's financial future, and never looked back.

Despite being a non-Canadian, Awesome was added to Lance Storm's Team Canada stable. He then lost his mullet in a hair-vs.-hair match against The Filthy Animals. Although Awesome entered WCW with a major championship, he never won gold in the Time Warner/Turner organization.

After the WWF purchased WCW, Awesome was the first WCW wrestler to win a WWF championship, snagging the hardcore belt. He was reunited with Canadian teammate Lance Storm as part of the WWF vs. WCW/ECW Alliance storyline, but Awesome didn't catch on in that company. After a short stint on Smackdown in 2002, WWE released him. He had a brief run in TNA before returning to Japan and then the independent scene. He defeated Satoshi Kojima for the Major League Wrestling title. only to lose it to Steve Corino 10 minutes later.

In 2005, Awesome returned to the American





Awesome renewed his partnership with Lance Storm in the WWF, where they were members of the WCW/ECW Alliance. The Alliance might have fizzled quickly, but WWF loyalists such as Christian still felt their wrath.

wrestling scene, facing longtime rival Tanaka at the WWE-sponsored ECW One Night Stand. Although Joey Styles referred to Awesome as a "Judas" during his play-by-play, the match stole the show, with fans cheering and chanting throughout the brawl. Veteran ECW star Tommy Dreamer singled out Awesome's performance in particular, commenting, "His last name said it all."

Despite lousy gimmicks and controversial jumps between companies. Awesome was always an amazing performer in the ring. He had tremendous ability and utilized it fully. In fact, WWE offered Awesome a contract to wrestle in the new ECW.

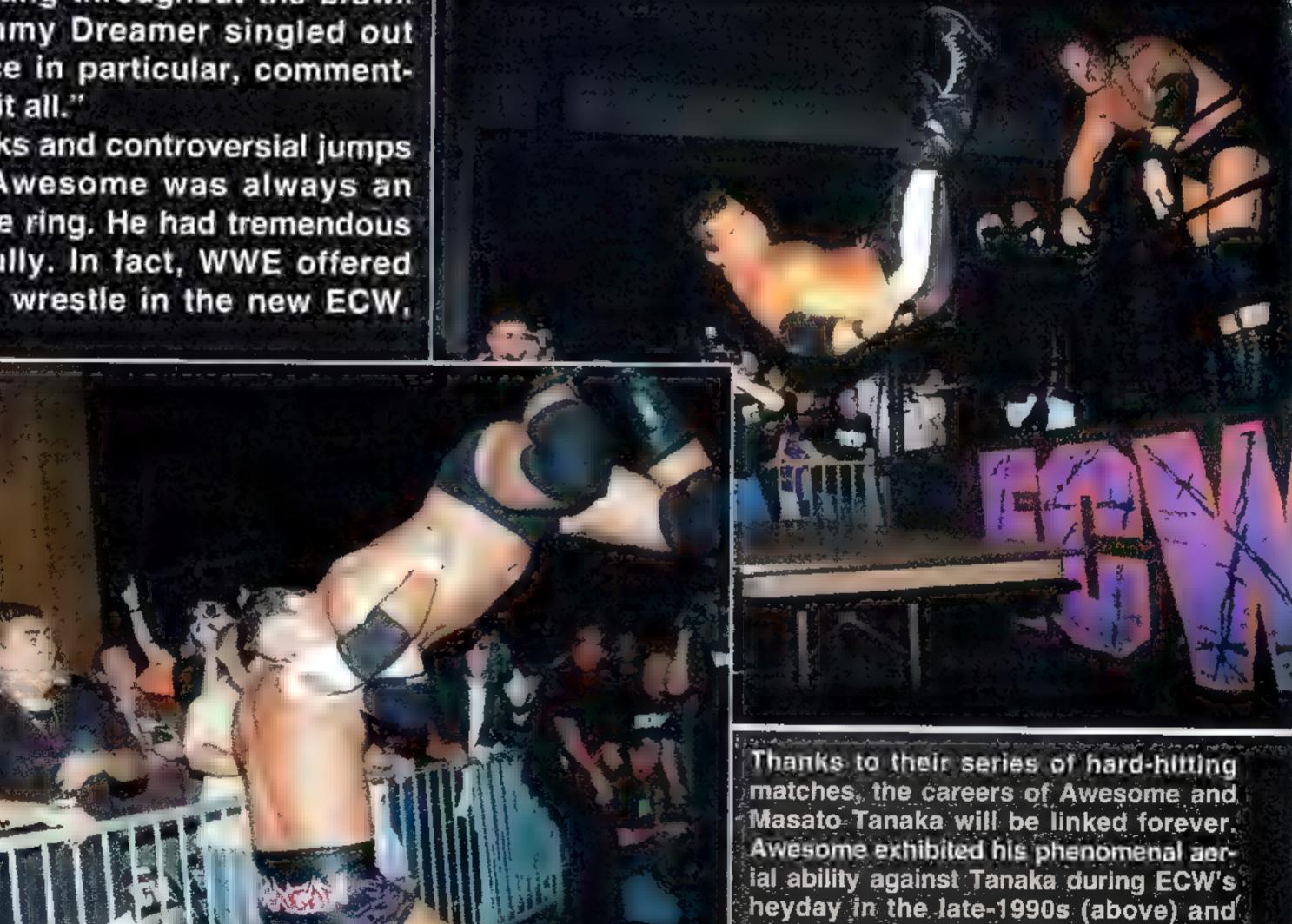
but he turned it down, choosing to spend time with his family and start a real estate business.

He was warmly remembered by many of his colleagues in wrestling, notably Lance Storm, who shared these thoughts on Awesome's passing via his website, stormwrestling.com: I have a lot of fond memories of Mike Awesome. I got to

work with him in four different companies [FMW, ECW, WCW, and WWE] as well as wrestling with or against him on five PPVs for three different companies. In addition to all the time we spent together at work, Mike was one of those few guys in the business that I met that I likely would have been friends with had I met him elsewhere in life. Mike shared my love for reading and seemed to be a very happy and loyal family man. If Mike and I had lived in the same city, I'm sure our families would have become very close. I cannot express how surprised and saddened I am to hear about his death. Mike will be very missed, and I send my condolences to his family."

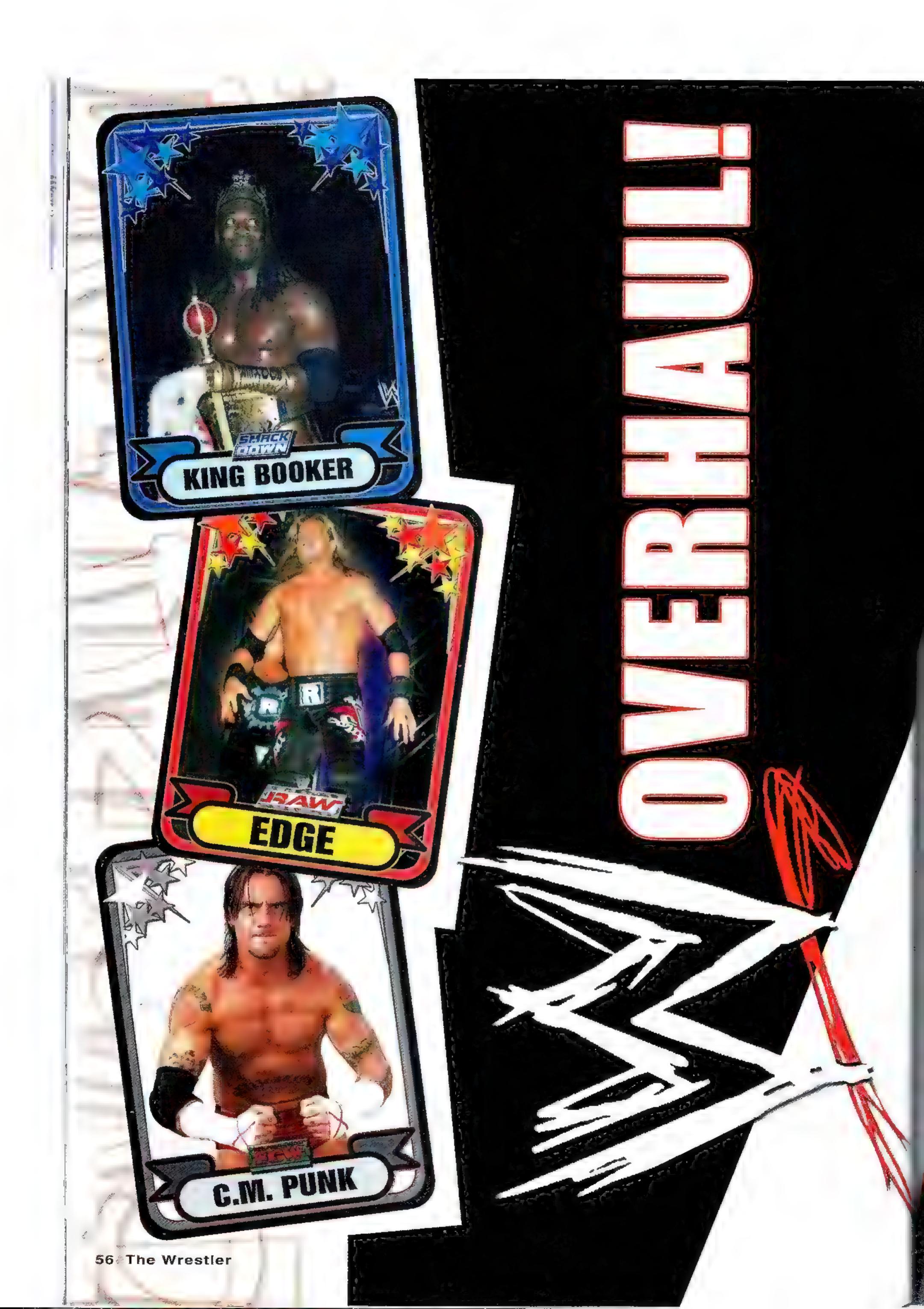
ECW star Rob Van Dam also posted his thoughts on robvandam.com: "I've said this many times, and I'll likely say it many more. The longer you live, the more friends and acquaintances you'll see pass on. This week we say goodbye to Mike Awesome. I spent time back in the old ECW with Mike and in WWE in 2001. We shared a car together, often with Shawn Stasiak. I definitely considered him a friend and miss him already."

Awesome is survived by his wife and two kids, but it is his legacy in the ring that fans will most remember. As it turned out, his battle against Masato Tanaka at One Night Stand 2005 was his final television appearance, a match that ended with fans chanting "This match rules!" Undoubtedly, that's how any wrestler would want to conclude an awesome career.



again at the One Night Stand reunion

pay-per-view in 2005 (left).



EPLANTO REINLIGORATE EBRAND ETTENSION

Wasn't the original idea behind the WWE brand extension to give the two WWE brands (now three) distinct rosters to allow more wrestlers to shine? Right now, there's no rhyme or reason as to who appears where, when, or even why or how often. But we could change all that

By Dave Lenker

HERE WAS A time, believe it or not, when WWE was truly committed to the brand extension. This was, of course, almost half a decade ago, when the plan was first put into place, when TNA was still in the planning stages, and when Vince McMahon wanted to give the appearance of competition within WWE's own ranks.

The red-shirted wrestlers from Raw were taught to hate their blue-shirted brethren from Smackdown. Why? Why not? There was almost no cooperation between the new brands. And Michael Cole was heard to remark during Smackdown, "I don't even watch Raw."

McMahon must have heard that remark and rethought the policy a bit. The competition aspect stuck for a while, but he couldn't have one of his employees telling viewers of one of his shows that it's okay not to watch the flagship program.

A year after WWE implemented the original brand extension, the first talent draft took place. Then-General Managers Eric Bischoff (Raw) and Paul Heyman (Smackdown) randomly picked balls out of a lottery bin, each signifying a different wrestler. It made for a compelling Raw. There was a trading period over the next few days, with several wrestlers changing sides (including Triple-H, who was drafted by Smackdown and then dealt back to Raw).



In 2005, the draft was spread over several weeks for maximum ratings benefits. That year, we saw Raw's champion, Batista, end up with Smackdown, and Smackdown's champion, John Cena, move to Raw. Last spring there was no draft. But we would see the occasional wrestler switch brands because his contract was allowed to expire (wink, wink).

In the past year, the guidelines regarding the moving, dropping, and adding of talent must have gotten lost on someone's desk. Or maybe after ECW was resurrected, it became too complicated and the new prevailing rule was that there were no rules anymore.

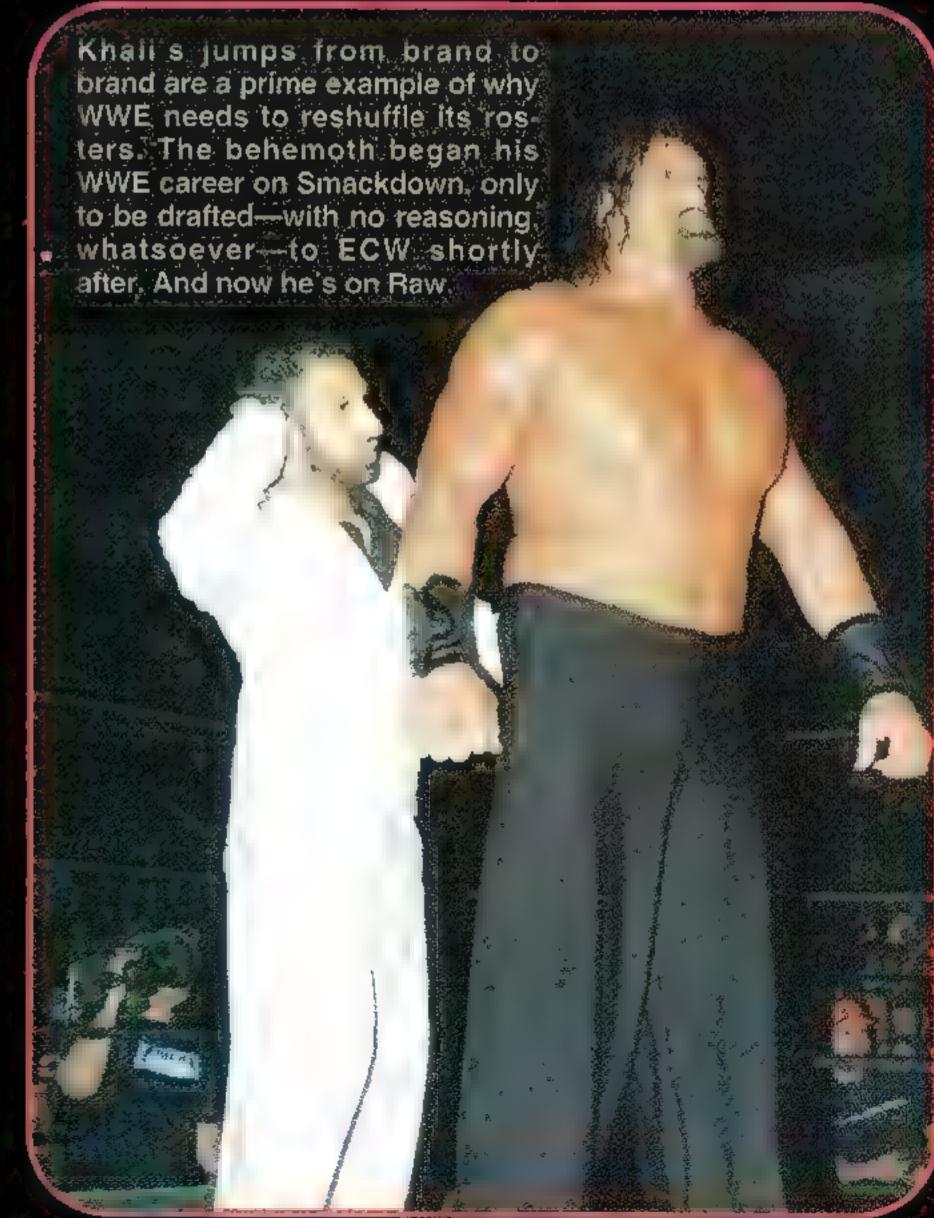
Let's focus on a few examples, shall we?

•The Great Khali has been shifted from Smackdown to ECW to Raw with no explanation.

•The Hardys have competed as a team on Raw, Smackdown, and ECW shows, even though Jeff is the property of Raw and Matt is the property of Smackdown (we think).

 Raw and Smackdown wrestlers became regular guest stars of ECW's program on Sci Fi for a period of approximately two months.

*Bobby Lashley, one of WWE's most promising young stars, moved from Smackdown to ECW, um, just because. And was Smackdown GM Teddy Long fuming because of it? No, he bumped into Lashley a few months later in the dressing room, gave him a big hug, told him how proud he was of what Lashley had accomplished in ECW, and then invited the new ECW champ to appear on



Smackdown. Lashley did just that and ended up demanding and getting a match with Ken Kennedy on Smackdown's No Way Out PPV.

Confused, or have you given up looking for logic in all of this?

We were about ready to do that, but instead, we took the initiative and devised a multi-point plan to turn this brand extension back into what it was originally intended to be. We created order out of chaos and instituted some rules.

1. APPOINT A GENERAL MANAGER FOR EACH BRAND

This seems almost too simple. But at press time, only Smackdown had a real GM. Raw sort of has Vince McMahon, with Coach taking charge whenever Mr. Mac is absent. Smackdown has the very level-headed Long, while ECW had Heyman as a "representative" until he took a hiatus from WWE in December. Now, we suppose, those nameless, faceless "ECW officials" are huddling in the dark and calling the shots.

To make the moving of talent more interesting, each brand needs a face, a voice of authority (and preferably not one who favors the heels, please). Imagine a Major League Baseball team making deals at the trading deadline with no GM there to explain the rationale behind all the wheeling and dealing. The trades just somehow happened. Wouldn't it be fun to have the GMs interviewed on TV from time to time so they could tell us how they would like to mold their rosters? That brings us to ...

2. NO MORE RANDOM DRAFT LOTTERIES

Had Smackdown not selected Batista with its last random pick in the most recent draft, we might still be seeing both world titles in WWE defended primarily on Raw shows. In theory, Smackdown could have chosen Val Venis instead of "The Animal" that night. WWE wants all three brands to be strong, and all of us want the same. Let's take the element of chance out of this. No totally random moves between brands, no contracts of big stars conveniently expiring, and no random lottery, but

3. MAKE THE LOTTERY BIGGER AND BET-TER THAN EVER

That's right, bigger and better. How? By holding it in three stages. We don't just mean stretch it out over three or four weeks (although that could still be done a each stage). We mean hold each of the three mands' drafts at different times during the year. Our dea would be to allow one brand to pilfer from the other two brands (let's say six picks over three meeks) starting on the week after WrestleMania, one pilfer starting on the week after SummerSlam, and the third to pilfer starting on the week after Survivor

Series. No champions would be eligible for the draft.

To make things more interesting (and fair), WWE could allow each brand to "franchise" or "protect" a certain number of wrestlers before each draft, meaning these wrestlers would not be eligible for the draft. However, there would need to be some sort of rule stopping the brands from protecting all the same wrestlers each time. Either that or institute a tiered system that would force each GM to designate a certain number of wrestlers as level-one stars (maineventers), a certain number of level-two wrestlers (strong mid-carders), and a certain number of level-three stars (the Funakis of the world). When it came time to draft, each brand would then have to pick, say, one star from each tier of both other brands.

4. TRADING TIME? ALL THE TIME!

Why did WWE allow GMs to make trades for only a couple of days after that first draft lottery? Trades should be allowed at any time. Even allow the GMs to make deals for wrestlers to be named later, which is common in baseball, and future draft picks. And in cases in which a wrestler is moved for another wrestler to be named later, each brand involved would have to agree to a time frame in which the wrestler would have to be named. An independent arbiter could decide a worthy wrestler to complete the transaction. This would allow for enough movement during the year and make those random jumps unnecessary.

The only instance in which a wrestler could simply sign with another brand would be a case in which a GM decided he didn't want the wrestler any longer and released him from the brand. Eugene—Raw trash at this point—could be a Smackdown treasure for Mr. Long.



One reason why Smackdown is currently redeeming itself is because it is the only brand with a legitimate general manager. GM Teddy Long has guided WWE's Friday night show in the right direction. Too bad the other brands don't have similar guidance.



5. ETC., ETC., ETC.

A few other ideas to consider as we overhaul the brand extension:

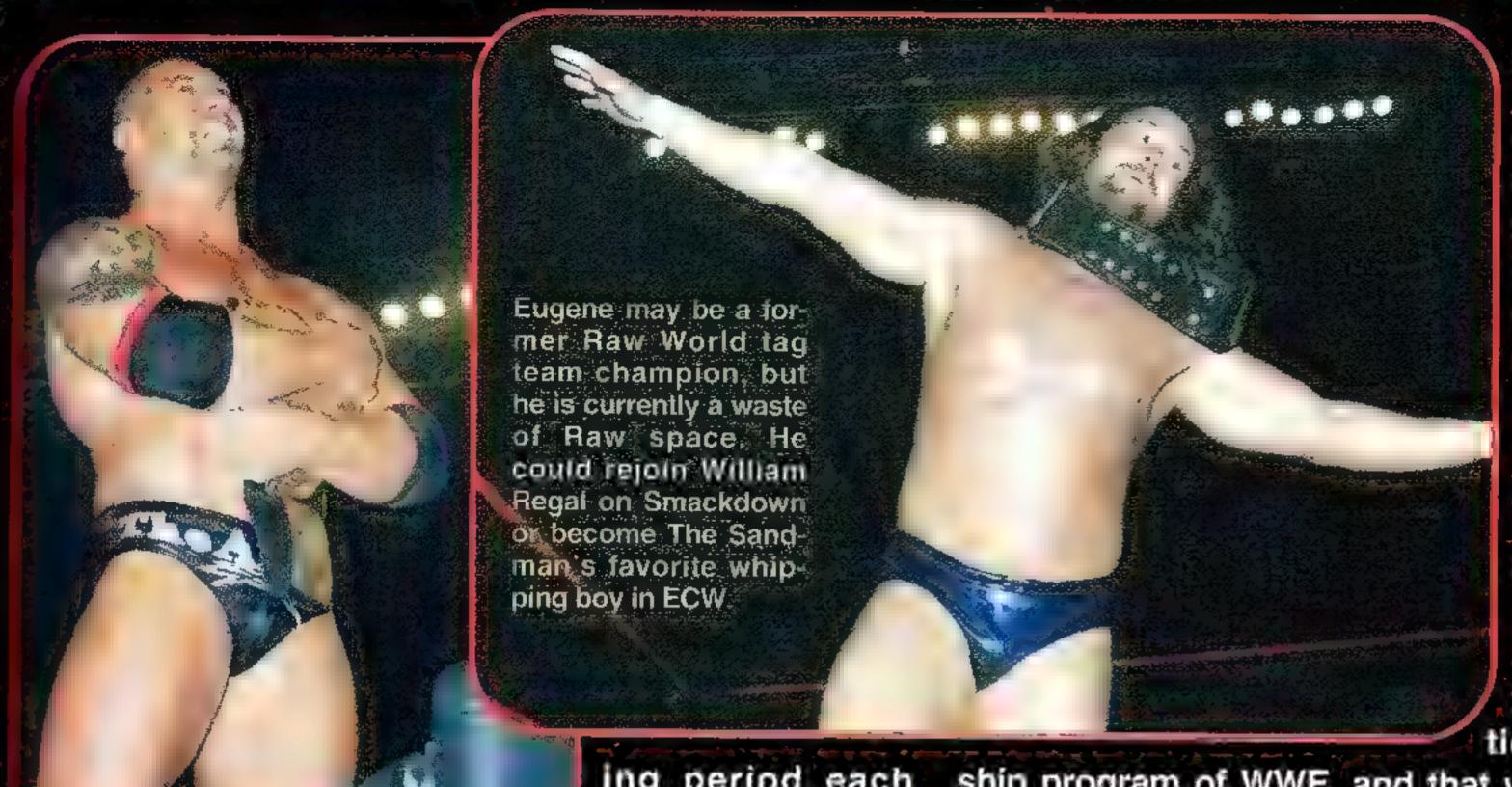
•Consider that ECW is clearly the smallest and weakest of the three brands and make appropriate concessions. ECW should not be allowed to lose or gain as many wrestlers as Raw and Smackdown when draft time arrives.

*What should be done about new arrivals to WWE, as in new acquisitions (Umaga, for example) or developmental stars deemed ready for promotion (Deuce and Domino, for example)? If only one general manager were interested, that GM would be free to sign the star. If more than one GM were interested, each interested GM would get to appoint one of its wrestlers to represent his or her brand in a match with the new wrestler's services up for grabs. The brand whose wrestler won the interbrand match would get the new star. The loser of the match then could not be made exempt from the next draft.

 Consider having a few interbrand matches during each drafting period (or perhaps just during one draft-

Rob Van Dam, the conscience of ECW, not so long ago played the role of WWE's golden child. He was carrying two brands, Raw and ECW, on his shoulders—along with both belts.





Our method of revamping the three brands would leave champions out of the draft, ensuring championship sta- loser of the match bility. The Smackdown belt would remain the Smackdown belt because the Smackdown World champ would Perhaps the eleremain on Smackdown for as long as ment of chance he held the title.

here, with the wrestlers competing in these matches chosen at random.

 Allow wrestlers who compete regularly and primarily as tag teams to be moved exclusively as units. Same goes for managers and valets and the wrestlers they represent-unless (in either case) any

of the stars involved waives this right. Heck, if Rory of The Highlanders thinks Robbie has been holding him back, singles glory is his to pursue if the opporfunity comes knocking!

A BRAND NEW (WWE) WORLD!

Quite frankly, our overhaul doesn't shake the very foundation of WWE or enything so grandiose. What it essenally does is give WWE the best of two worlds. It gives the promotion three very distinct brands with very sturdy ences built around their boundaries. That's what the brand extension originalset out to do.

But somewhere along the way, Vince CMahon decided it was a little too should change. John Cena is the most estrictive creatively. Only allowing interand matches at WrestleMania wasn't

arough. Too many exciting potential matchups were aken off the board. Our new system would keep estlers from one brand away from those of the other brands, but it would allow for regular reshuffling of

ing period each year) in which the winner would get to either join anothbrand of his choice or send the to another brand. could be a factor

the three rosters.

In short, it would be hard for things to grow stale for long (if ever) in the three brands. But could this new system allow each brand to establish its own identity?

To suggest that all three promotions would ever considered be absolute equals would be unrealistic. Raw is the flag-

ship program of WWE, and that will continue for the foreseeable future. John Cena is WWE's top star. He's not likely to switch brands anytime soon. Raw will always have some great heavyweights in its World title mix and great depth on its roster. ECW is likely to always be a distant third. Smackdown is somewhere in the middle, although the quality of the brand's shows is stronger now than it has been in years.

As of press time, Cena, Batista, and Lashley were, as the champions of the three brands, arguably WWE's three biggest stars. We like Cena where he is, but with Lashley's star on the rise and Batista in a bit of a decline going into WrestleMania 23, it would make sense to have Lashley back representing Smackdown and the more limited Batista carving out a new niche in ECW. His technical shortcomings could be masked in ECW, where he could compete in a lot of matches con-

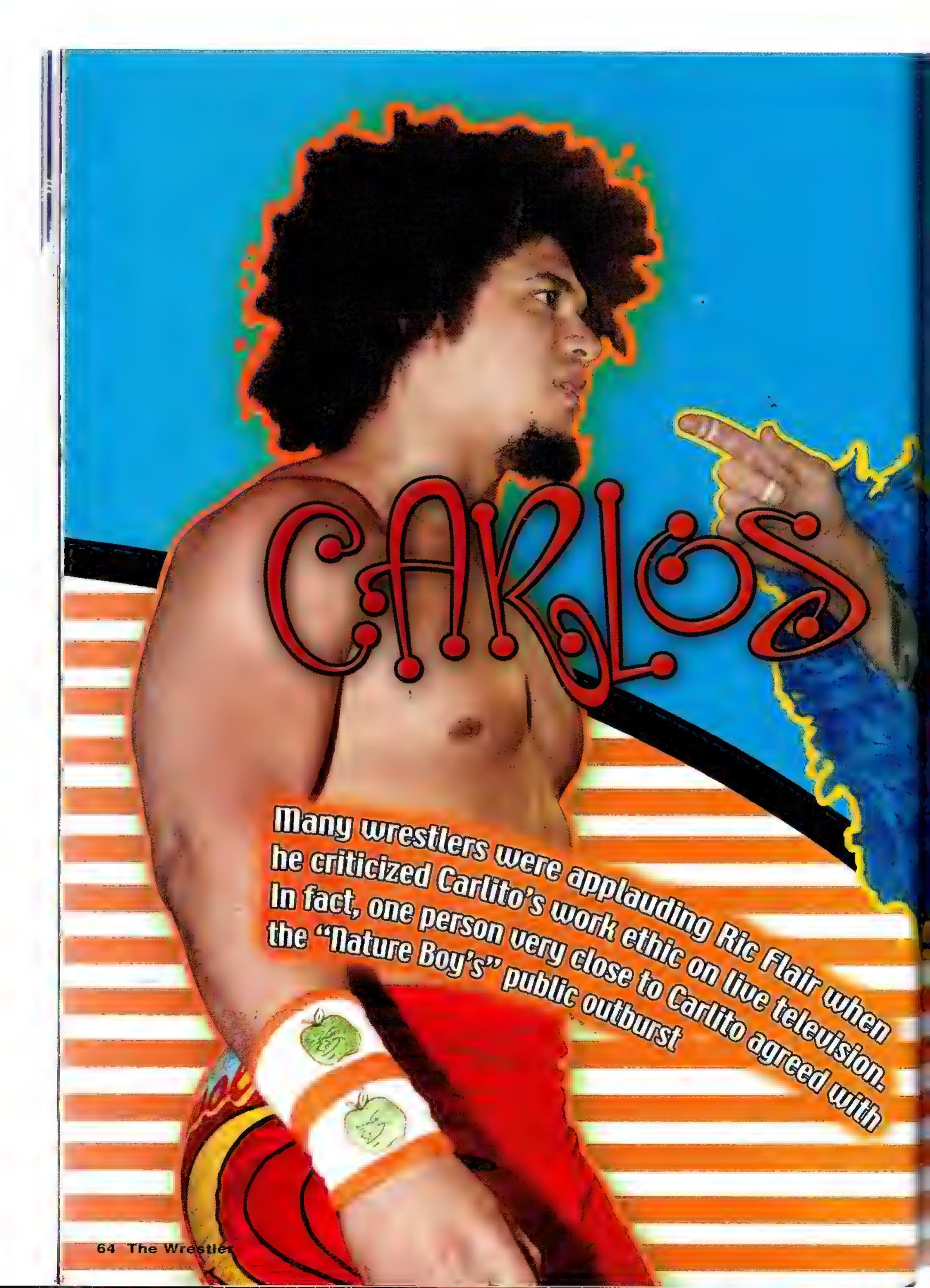
> tested under extreme rules. Of course, our new rules wouldn't allow champions to switch brands, but Lashley could benefit from the extra exposure he'd get with Smackdown.

> It would be good to see ECW become the brand in which you got an excellent mix of extreme action and great scientific wrestling (say one brilliant 20to 25-minute bout every Tuesday night) and Smackdown become the exclusive WWE home of tag team wrestling (and the only brand with a tag team title) and cruiserweight competition (cruisershowcased, that is).

Of course, this would require GMs with the right vision and rosters that would be subject to change throughout year. The ensuing controversies all would be part of the fun.



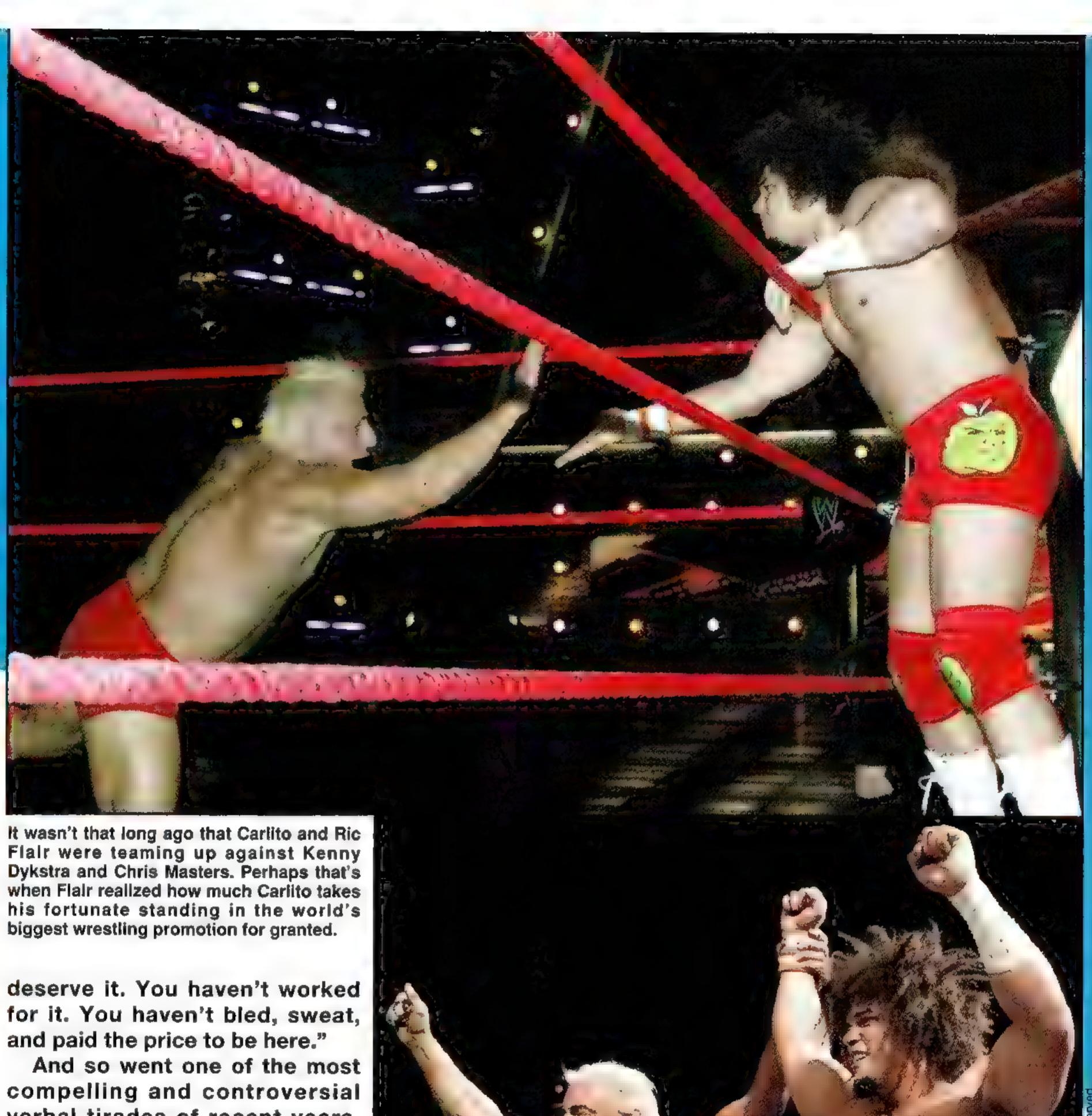
Just because we advocate a revamping of WWE's brand extension, doesn't mean we are suggesting that everything appropriate wrestler to hold the Raw weight action that was truly World heavyweight belt at this time.



TRICFIAR IS RIGHT ABOUT CARLITOR

By Timothy Drake

AVE YOU EVER stopped to think there's a reason why guys like you—that's right, guys like you—aren't in the main event? Maybe it's because you're a lazy, underachieving, son of a [expletive deleted], lucky to be walking the hall of this building, lucky to be on the Raw roster, lucky to be here at all. My problem is guys like you that have no passion, no guts. You want all the money, you want all the glory, you want to flyrirst-class. But you don't



And so went one of the most compelling and controversial verbal tirades of recent years. The speaker was Ric Flair, unquestionably one of sport's greatest champions. The object of his fury was Carlito, at one time pegged by observers to be a future. WWE main-eventer. Carlito, in a breach of wrestling tradition, was about to leave the arena early and miss the main event. It was too much for Flair, and he gave voice to what many wrestlers and fans had been thinking for a very long time.

Indeed, the confrontation was the talk of the wrestling world for weeks. Given the respect Flair has in the business, it was not surprising that few wrestlers jumped to Carlito's defense. But most

assumed he would have at least one staunch defender—his father Carlos Colon, the Puerto Rican legend who, for three decades, dominated the World Wrestling Council (see sidebar). Colon

remained silent for several weeks before finally consenting to an interview.

The great champion was standing in a makeshift ring in his private gym in San Juan. "It's in this ring where I taught Carly," said Colon. He paused and looked off into the distance. "To get to the heart of the matter, I love my son and it hurts me to say it, but Ric Flair is right." Colon's

Carlos Colon is to the WWC what Jerry Lawler was to Memphis, Simply put, Colon is Puerto

Colon—who was born in Santa Isabel, Puerto Rican wrestling. Rico, on July 18, 1948—began his career in 1966, wrestling his first match against Bobo Brazil. For several years, he worked for promotions through-

out North America. He had a memorable stint in Stu Hart's Stampede Wrestling, where he wrestled as Carlos Belafonte.

His career took off in 1974 with the formation of the World Wrestling Council. In the 1970s, Colon held the company's top title, the North American championship, seven times. He also distinguished himself in the tag team division, winning tag championships with eight different partners. In 1982, the WWC recognized Abdullah the Butcher as the first holder of the WWC heavy-

weight championship, a title that Colon would soon win.

Abdullah, without a doubt, was Colon's greatest adversary. Colon first met the Butcher in the early-'70s in Stampede. They resumed their feud In the WWC in 1978—a feud that didn't end until 1997! They met in steel cage matches as well as in the earliest barbed-wire matches. They took their feud to the heart of the NWA, awing the crowd at the first Starrcade event in 1983. In nearly every encounter, the Sudanese madman

gouged Colon with a metal fork. The Butcher once blinded his toe with ammonia and, on another occasion, attacked him in the shower.

Long before anyone had ever heard of extreme wrestling, Colon and the Butcher were hardcore.

Colon made a career out of taking on the biggest and baddest. Throughout the '70s and '80s, he engaged in bloody

feuds with Gorilla Monsoon, Bruiser Brody, Hercules Ayala, and Stan Hansen, In 1987, Hansen temporarily retired Colon after a brutal and humiliating assault in a restaurant. But Colon came back and exacted revenge.

in the early-1980s, even as he defended the WWC title, Colon frequently competed for the NWA World title, taking both Harley Race and Ric Flair to the limit. On December 18, 1983, Colon achieved the greatest victory of his career: He defeated then-NWA World champion Flair in a no-disqualification/steel cage

match to become the first WWC Universal champion. By 1999, Colon had captured the Universal title a record 26 times.

is it any wonder why Flair was so hard on Carlito? Flair knew the old man had bled, sweat, and paid the price to be an all-time great, is Carlito willing to make that sacrifice? —Timothy Drake



Daddy's been there and knows best



scarred face tensed up.

Carlito has enjoyed the honor of being escorted by WWE's most beautiful Divas. Recently,
Torrie Wilson has stepped up beside him. But Flair says Carlito hasn't paid enough dues to deserve such women.

"We were all sad to see Carly go to WWE. But I was proud that he felt he had to go. It took guts. It took passion. Some locals

that was bull. He knew he could be one of the top stars in the world. He always dreamed of

working in WWE, and so he went for it. I didn't like the way he was doing it and that led to problems between us for a while. But I could never deny his passion. And even when we were at odds, I always respected him."

"Remember Wres_ tleMania 21? Carly came to the ring, uninvited, and

In recent months, Carlito has fallen behind in the WWE roster. At Survivor Series, he only appeared in a dark match against Charlie Haas. Flair says—and Daddy Colon agrees—that such are the consequences when you lose sight of championship gold.

Roddy Piper and 'Stone Cold' Steve Austin, two of WWE's biggest stars ever. He got his butt kicked but was back the next night. Nothing could hold him down. For gosh sakes, on his first night in WWE, he beat John Cena for the United States title. What other wrestler has done something like that? And then he won the Intercontinental title on his first night on Raw! When he started in WWE, he was wrestling the top fan favorites, and so the fans booed him. But it didn't take him very long for him to win them over. When he wrestled his last big match as a WWC wrestler. knew we wouldn't see Carlito for a long time ... because he'd be a smash in WWE."

chall-

enged

Then known as Carly Colon, Carlito wrestled his last match as a WWC regular in August 2004. Carly had shocked the Puerto Rican fans by feuding with his brother, Eddie, which culminated in a showdown at the WWC Anniversary Show in Caguas. Carly was only 25 years



68 The Wrestler



Carlito had better get over his cocky mind set ... before his main-event promise passes him by. Did Flair's tirade serve to antagonize or motivate him? Even Carlos Colon thinks Flair was doing him a favor.

old at the time, but had already enjoyed great success in the business. After his debut in November 1999, Carly went on to defend his family's honor in a bloody war with Ray Gonzalez. He captured the WWC's top singles title, the Universal championship, 10 times. He held the WWC tag team title twice, first

with brother Eddie and later with Konnan. Following his sensational match against Eddie in Caguas, some fans were openly wondering whether he would become the champion of Raw or Smackdown.

By the start of 2006, that sentiment no longer seemed like such a remote possibility.

Carlito was impressive at 2006's New Year's Revolution, where he eliminated Shawn Michaels and nearly won the Raw World title from John Cena But by mid-year, he was stuck in the mid-card. He was better known for his romances with Maria, Trish Stratus, and Torrie Wilson than for his inring achievements. By the end of the year, some critics had dismissed him as a flash-inthe-pan.

What happened?

Carlito's father has an explanation. "Carly takes his wrestling career for granted because he has been around the business all his life," said Colon, "Because he was my son, he was a star from Day One. And he has physical gifts that most wrestlers would kill for. It all came a bit too easy for him, and I know I'm partly to blame, I'm not saying he's lazy. It's just that, at this point, he lacks focus. He has to stop worrying about the girls and stop worrying about having the best line of the night. He has a sense of fun that everybody likes, but there's a time to be serious. On a physical level and on a mental level, he has to kick into a higher gear if he wants to be a true great. And I know he has the potential to be the greatest ever."

Since Flair castigated him, Carlito appears to be kicking into a higher gear. He boldly challenged Flair to a match at WrestleMania 23. He even teamed with the "Nature Boy" on Raw. And under no circumstances whatsoever has Carlito attempted

to leave the arena early.

Is this rededication to his craft only temporary? Or is he finally ready to take up the mantle and establish himself as a legend in his own right? Whatever happens, Carlos Colon will be there for his son, offering him support-even though that support must sometimes take the form of tough love.

TOP 10

1 JOHN CENA 260, West Newbury, MA (1) Raw World champion

2 BATISTA
318, Washington, DC
(2) Smackdown World champion

3 BOBBY LASHLEY 255, Topeka, KS

4 CHRISTIAN CAGE
225, Toronto, Ontario
(4) NWA World champion

5 TAKESHI MORISHIMA 297, Tokyo, Japan (-) Ring of Honor champion

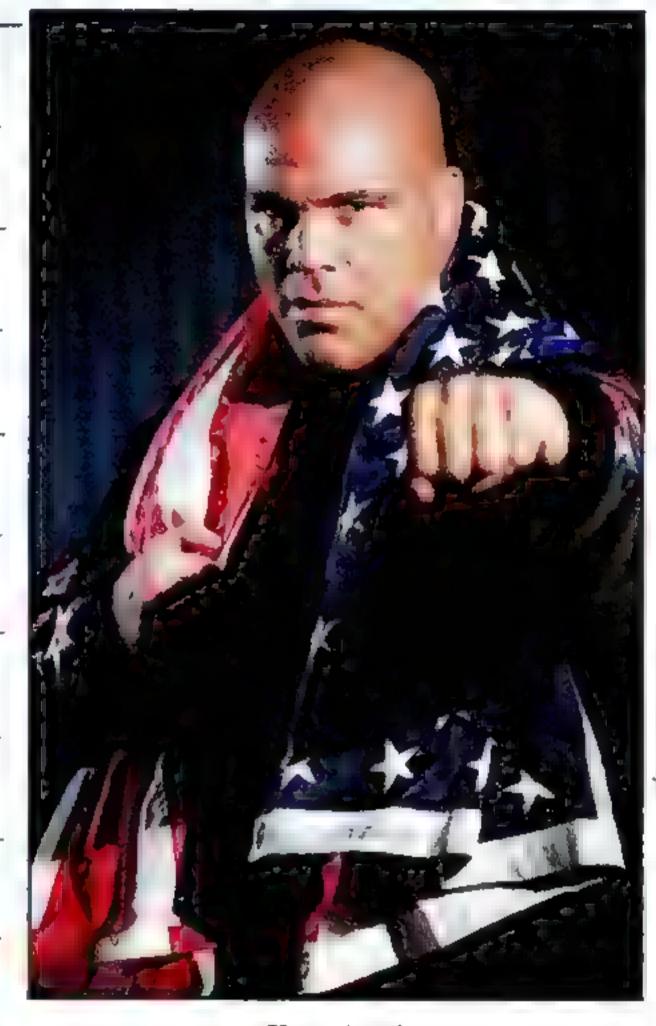
6 HIROSHI TANAHASHI
227, Ogaki, Japan
(5) IWGP heavyweight champion

7 THE UNDERTAKER
304, Dallas, TX
(-) No. 1 contender: 5D World Hitle

8 SHAWN MICHAELS 217, San Antonio, TX

9 MINORU SUZUKI
220, Yokohama, Japan
(7) All Japan Triple Crown champion

10 KURT ANGLE
233, Pittsburgh, PA
(10) No. 1 contender: NWA World title



Kurt Angle

TAG TEAMS

JOHN CENA & SHAWN MICHAELS
Combined weight: 477 pounds

(-) Row World tag team champions

Combined weight: 495 pounds
(1) NWA World tag team champions

3 PAUL LONDON & BRIAN KENDRICK Combined weight: 380 pounds (3) Smackdown World tag team champions

DEUCE & DOMINO
Combined weight: 497 pounds
(-) No. 1 contenders: 5D World tag team title

5 CODY RUNNELS & SHAWN SPEARS
Combined weight: 467 pounds

(5) OVW Southern tog team champions
SHELTON BENJAMIN & CHARLIE HAAS

Combined weight: 480 pounds

(6) No. 1 contenders: Raw World tag team title

7 JOEY MERCURY & JOHNNY NITRO

Combined weight: 417 pounds

(-) No. 2 contenders: Raw World tag team title

8 GIANT BERNARD & TRAVIS TOMKO
Combined weight: 645 pounds
(-) IWGP International tag team champions

9 NARUKI DOL & SNINGO
Combined weight: 370 pounds

(-) Ring of Honor tag team champions
TEAM JD

Combined weight: 521 pounds
(-) No. 1 contenders: NWA World tag team title

WWE RAW

Raw World Champion:

(C) 260, West Newbury, MA

1 - SHAWN MICHAELS (4) 217, San Antonio, TX

2-UMAGA (1) 348, Isle of Samoa

3-JEFF HARDY (2) 212, Cameron, NC 4-EDGE

(3) 240, Toronto, Ontario 5-CARLITO

(8) 220, San Juan, Puerto Rico

6-KENNY DYKSTRA (6) 234, Worcester, MA

7 - RANDY ORTON (10) 245, St. Louis, MO

8-THE GREAT KHALI (-) 408, Bombay, India

9-RIC FLAIR (-) 243, Charlotte, NC

10-CHRIS MASTERS (9) 270, Santa Monica, CA

WWE SMACKDOWN

Smackdown World Champion: BATISTA

(C) 318, Washington, DC

1—THE UNDERTAKER (2) 304, Dallas, TX

2 - FINLAY (5) 230, Belfast, Ireland

3 - CHRIS BENOIT (3) 224, Edmonton, Alberta

4-KING BOOKER (4) 250, Houston, TX

5-KEN KENNEDY (1) 246, Minneapolis, MN

6-KANE (7) 326, St. Louis, MO

7 - MATT HARDY (9) 213, Cameron, NC

8-CHAVO GUERRERO JR. (6) 210, El Paso, TX

9-MVP (8) 252, Miami, FL

10-DAIVARI (-) 203, Minneapolis, MN

ECW Champion: BOBBY LASHLEY

(C) 255, Topeka, KS 1 - C.M. PUNK

(2) 210, Chicago, IL 2-ROB VAN DAM

(1) 237, Battle Creek, MI 3-SABU

(4) 220, Bombay, India
4-HARDCORE HOLLY

(6) 249, Mobile, Al. 5—ELIJAH BURKE (-) 230, Jacksonville, Fl.

6-MARCUS COR VON (-) 275, Saginaw, MI

7-KEVIN THORN (7) 270, Memphis, TN

8-MAHONEY (8) 361, Nutley, NJ

9-TOMMY DREAMER [10] 265, Yonkers, NY

10-MATT STRIKER (-) 215, Bayside, NY

TNA NWA World Champion: CHRISTIAN CAGE

(C) 225, Toronto, Ontario

(1) 233, Pittsburgh, PA
2-STING

(3) 255, Venice Beach, CA

3 - CHRIS SABIN (4) 207, Detroit, MI

4 - SAMOA JOE (5) 270, Isle of Samoa

5 – ABYSS (2) 295, parts unknown

6-RHINO (6) 275, Detroit, MI

7-A.J. STYLES

(10) 202, Gainesville, GA 8-TRAVIS TOMKO

(-) 292, Tombstone, AZ 9 - JAMES STORM

9 – JAMES STORM (7) 225, Franklin, TN

10-SENSHI (-) 170, Brooklyn, NY

OFFICIAL RATINGS

Top 10 and Tag Team ratings are based on won-lost records for the past month, quality of opposition, and inherent skill of each wrestler or team. These ratings are compiled by the magazine's editorial board. All other ratings are based on the official current positions of challengers to the top title in each category; certain titleholders receive an automatic spot in the ratings. The number in parentheses indicates a wrestler's position in that category last issue; (-) indicates that the wrestler was not rated in that category last issue while (C) indicates the wrestler was champion in that category last issue. Note: In an effort to keep the ratings as up-to-date as possible, these pages are often the last to be sent to the printer. Thus, the ratings may reflect changes not reflected in the remainder or the issue.

For period ended March 16, 2007

ANARCHY CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: Champion—Scott Summers; 1—Mike Dell; 2—Scotty Riggs; 3—Nigel McGuinness; 4—Jerry Lynn; 5—Darin Childs; 6— Arik Cannon; 7—Jaykus Pliskem; 8—Sharkboy; 9—Rexx Reed; 10—Skylar Skelly.

AWA SUPREME CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: Champion—Billy Maverick; 1-Damien Divine; 2-C.J. Popp; 3-Ricky Ruckus; 4-Eric Draven; 5-John Stratlin; 6—Brandon Hunter; 7—Nic Noble; 8—William Valentine; 9—Mike Trusty; 10—Biff Wellington III.

CAROLINA WRESTLING ENTERTAINMENT: Champion—Scotty Matthews; I— Aaron Devil; 2—Bounty Hunter; 3—D.J. P Roc; 4—J. Synn; 5—Eddie Brown; 6— D.Z. Hyde; 7—Scrapyard Dog; 8—Leroy Green; 9—Rick Link; 10—Sean Altly.

FULL THROTTLE WRESTLING: Champion—Damian Blade; 1—Sly the Redneck Extremist; 2—Xavier Frost; 3—Xander Frost; 4—Curtis Payne; 5—Cory Pillman; 6—Gideon Morbid; 7—Ivan Stroganof; 8—Joey Grunge; 9—Fusion; 10— Napalm,

IWA MID-SOUTH: Champion—Chuck Taylor; 1—Low Ki; 2—Josh Abercrombie; 3—Drake Younger; 4—Arik Cannon; 5—Chris Hero; 6—Davey Richards; 7—Jan Rotten; 8—Necro Butcher; 9—Mickie Knuckles; 10—Steve Corino.

NEW WORLD WRESTLING: Champion—Don Vega; 1—Jimmy Cash; 2—Texas Outlaw; 3—Gino Martino; 4—Eric Shred; 5—Rick Fuller; 6—Osirus; 7—Jay Jaillette; 8—Pierre Vachon; 9—The Outpatient; 10—Moondog Maximus.

NORTHEAST WRESTLING: Champion—Xavier; 1—Samoa Joe; 2—Jay Lethal; 3—Christian Cage; 4—A.J. Styles; 5—Kurt Angle; 6—Jerry Lawler; 7—Romeo Roselli; 8—Kurt Adonis; 9—Jeff Starr; 10—Jim Neidhart.

PRIMAL CONFLICT WRESTLING: Champion—Tommy Hawk; 1—Switchblade; 2—Scott Fowler; 3—Brock Singleton; 4—Julio Dinero; 5—The Stro; 6 —Scotty McKeever; 7—Zachary Shane; 8—Christian York; 9—Bobby Shields; 10—Kermon the German.

RING WARS CAROLINA: Champion—Hangtime; 1—Aaron Devil; 2—Ali Steele; 3-Tre G.; 4-Styxx; 5-Tito Rain; 6-D.Z. Hyde; 7-Josh Hunter; 8-Johnny Atlas; 9—Walabee Joe; 10—Tex Mex.

TEXAS ALL-STAR WRESTLING: Champion—ZenZen; 1—T-Bone; 2—Bobby 2 Badd; 3—Nasty Nick Daniels; 4—Justin Blaze; 5—Nate Slater; 6—Dylan Starr; 7— Mr. Mayhem; 8—Bubba Lee Travis; 9—Rocco Carmanooch; 10—Nark the Nevulon.

WORLD REVOLUTIONS ENTERTAINMENT: Champion—John Deaton; 1— Nugene Ledbetter Jr.; 2-Josh La Rue; 3-Iron Mike Valentine; 4-Rocky Gilmore; 5—Randy the Rodeo Clown; 6—Plowboy; 7—Texas Red; 8—The Sinner; 9— Brandon Nichols; 10—Samantha.

WORLD X-TREME WRESTLING: Champion—The Great Samu; 1—D.J. Hyde; 2— Rage; 3—Zero Gravity; 4—Billy Dream; 5—Sugaa; 6—Havoc; 7—L.A. Smooth; 8—Rob Eckos; 9—Toa Maivia; 10—Damage.

RING OF HONOR

ROH Champion:

TAKESHI MORISHIMA

H 297, Tokyo, Japan

1 - HOMICIDE

(C) 220, Brooklyn, NY

2-RODERICK STRONG (4) 205, Tampa, FL

3-DELIRIOUS

(2) 192, parts unknown

4-JIMMY RAVE (9) 175, Atlanta, GA

5-NIGEL McGUINNESS (3) 220, London, England

6-MATT SYDAL

[-] 230, Bayside, CA

(10) 177, St. Louis, MO 7-BRENT ALBRIGHT

8-CLAUDIO CASTAGNOLI (–) 238, Schaffhausen, Switzerland

9-B.J. WHITMER (-) 230, Owensboro, KY

10-DAVEY RICHARDS (7) 202, Othello, WA

ovw

OVW Champion:

PAUL BIRCHALL

(C) 281, Surrey, England

1 – MIKE KRUEL

(4) 210, New York, NY

2-BORIS ALEXIEV (-) 255, Moscow, Russia

3-CHET THE JET (1) 230, Buffalo, NY

4-EDDIE KRAVEN (2) 205, New York, NY

5-JACOB DUNCAN (3) 335, Louisville, KY

6-VLADIMIR KOZLOV (9) 310, Moscow, Russia

7-LITTLE GUIDO [-] 209, Howard Beach, NY

B-CHARLES EVANS (6) 285, Third Ward, TX

9-MARK HENRY (-) 331, Silsbee, TX

10-DANIEL RODIMER (-) 275, Clearwater, FL

JAPAN

1 - HIROSHI TANAHASHI

(1) 227, Ogaki, Japan IWGP heavyweight champion

2-MINORU SUZUKI

(2) 220, Yokohama, Japan All Japan Triple Crown champion

3-MITSUHARU MISAWA

(3) 228, Ashikaga, Japan GHC heavyweight champion

4-NAOMICHI MARUFUJI (4) 211, Saitama, Japan

5-YUJI NAGATA (5) 228, Tokyo, Japan

6-SATOSHI KOJIMA (6) 243, Tokyo, Japan

7-HIROYOSHI TENZAN

(7) 270, Tokyo, Japan 8-TAKESHI MORISHIMA [-] 297, Tokyo, Japan

9-MINORU

(8) 198, Komaki, Japan IWGP jr. heavyweight champion

10-DON FUJI

(9) 225, Tokyo, Japan

MEXICO

I - MISTICO

(1) 177, Mexico City, Mexico

2-EL HIJO DEL SANTO

(2) 180, Tulancingo, Mexico

3-CIBERNETICO

(3) 175, Mexico City, Mexico

4-PERRO AGUAYO JR. (4) 200, Zacatecas, Mexico

5-ATLANTIS

(5) 180, Guadalajara, Mexico

6-DR. WAGNER JR. (6) 215, Mexico City, Mexico

7-LA PARKA

(7) 206, Sonora, Mexico

8-AVERNO

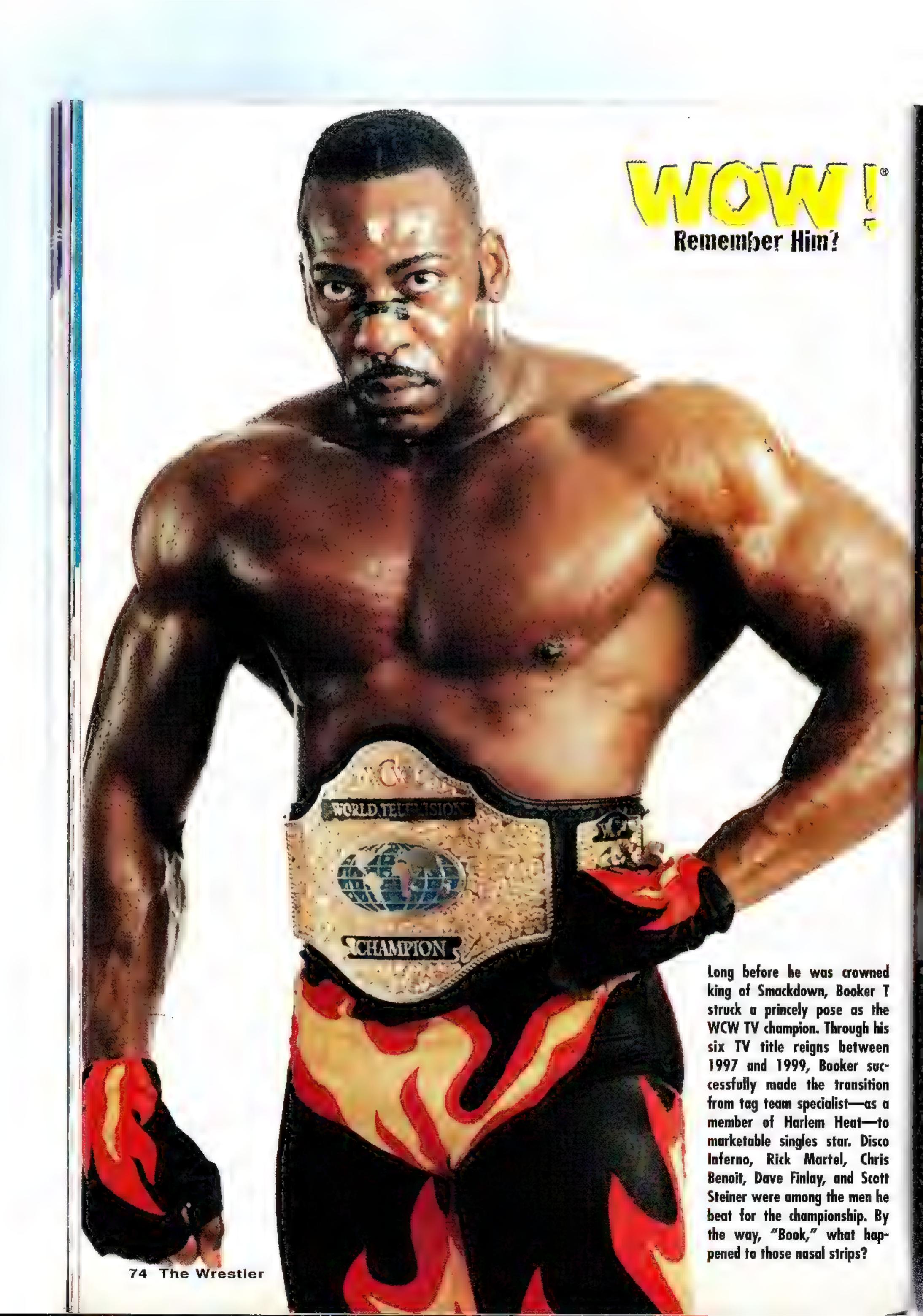
(8) 182, Mexico City, Mexico

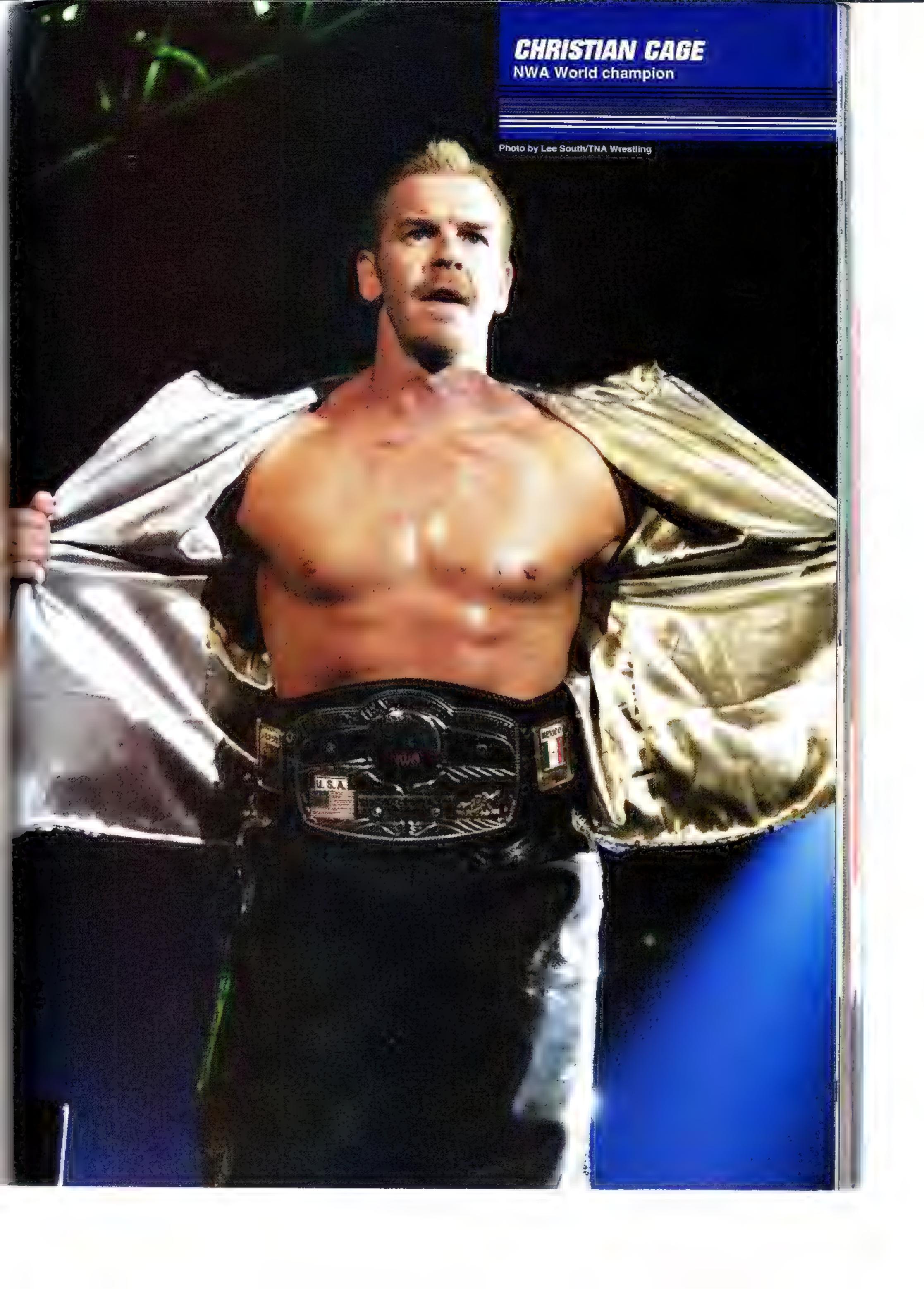
9-NEGRO CASAS

(9) 185, Mexico City, Mexico

10-L.A. PARK

[-] 235, Torreon, Mexico









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You may be looking at one-half of the next great Smackdown World tag team champions. Reader Rick Jackson thinks Elijah Burke (pictured) and Sylvester Terkay could find success outside of ECW.

GOOD RIDDANCE ECW?

I, along with nearly every other wrestling fan, cannot wait for the end of this cheap reproduction of the once-great ECW. So, when I head that ECW house shows had been canceled, I was overjoyed because I knew this marked the beginning of the end. Now, with ECW rounding the drain, I have compiled a list of what I think should be done with

ECW's top stars.

1. Rob Van Dam: After years of struggling to stay a main-event player in WWE, I think RVD's best option—barring a high-profile feud with Jeff Hardy—is to go to TNA where he would rise to the top faster than either Christian Cage or Kurt Angle. Not many wrestlers out there have a larger cult following than RVD, and no one is more deserving of a lengthy world title reign (if he can stay clean).

2. C.M. Punk: Now, here is the next megastar in the making. One month after his debut, he aiready had a following that could rival just about any of WWE's top talent, and it hasn't stopped growing yet. This kid screams Raw every time I see him. Imagine the matches he could have against Hardy, Johnny Nitro, and Edge. He is already Intercontinental material, and, if utilized correctly, he could be a cornerstone for yearsto come.

3. Bobby Lashley: I can't help but feel that this guy is one high-profile feud away from becoming a real contender for the Raw or Smackdown World titles. I have the perfect opponent: Chris Masters. Since the Carlito-

Masters feud seems to be going nowhere, these two powerhouses could put on one hell of a show.

4. Bob Holly: I think Holly only has one or two more good years left in him, and I think his time in the spotlight has passed. The only option left now is to put him into an entertaining feud against an opponent against whom he can excel. That opponent? The hard-hitting Irishman himself, Finlay.

5. Elijah Burke and Sylvester Terkay: Smackdown's tag division has grown stagnant, and that's a good enough reason for WWE to bring back Terkay as Burke's partner. Last year at this time the division was very promising, but now it is comprised primarily of two teams: the champions, Brian Kendrick and Paul London, and their top challengers, Deuce and Domino. At the very least, Burke could be a top mid-carder, on par with Ken Kennedy and MVP.

RICK JACKSON th3_gr8t_r1ck@yahoo.com

RECLAIM WHAT'S YOURS!

To the ECW originals: What are you thinking? You're letting Vince McMahon ruin ECW's great hardcore legacy. I'm glad to see that you guys are finally getting together and going after McMahon. Teach him what hardcore is really all about.

Reclaim Extreme Championship
- Wrestling!

ARNOLD LANCASTER South Wayne, WI

CENA EARNS HIS CRED

About a year ago, a lot of wrestling pundits were saying that John Cena had not earned the respect of the fans or his peers because he hadn't been through enough hard times. In particular, I remember how fans booed the heck out of him during a Raw World title defense against Kurt Angle and Shawn Michaels in a three-way match.

With nearly two years as a world champion to his credit, Cena has already demonstrated more championship staying power than Steve Austin or The Rock. Although Austin and Rock have an incredible 13 title reigns between them, Cena has already surpassed both of them

in terms of actual time as champion. And Cena has already established his dominance over another major star of the "Attitude" era, Triple-H.

Considering that he has humbled Edge, Umaga, and even Kevin Federline over the past few months, Cena now deserves the respect of the wrestling community.

LOUISE ADAMS Harlem, NY

BRAINS, BRAWN, AND BEAUTY

I was watching Christy Hemme's interview on TNA Impact. Miss Hemme was saying that she and the other women in TNA are not sex objects. Yes, the young ladies in TNA flaunt their assets to entertain the fans, but don't let that fool you. As Christy suggests, wrestling's women deserve more credit for their intelligence and physical abilities.

For all we know, Miss Hemme could be very good at chess or Chinese checkers. If Christy had been a nerd, nobody would give her the time of day, but she and most of the other young women in TNA possess both beauty and brains.

BILL GORMAN Huntsville, AR

PWC PROPOSAL

Here's my idea for the next great concept: the Pro Wrestling Channel. No, I'm not talking about WWE 24/7, or any other kind of video-on-demand service. I'm talking about a legitimate cable channel that does not require a monthly fee. It would be terrific if WWE would embrace this concept, and we could view footage of WWE, WCW, ECW, WCCW, and other top promotions as part of a basic cable service.

But, assuming that WWE wouldn't want to be involved in this venture, there remains potential footage from TNA, Ring of Honor, and promotions around the world. There must be a daring entrepreneur who can make archival wrestling footage part of the mainstream, not just a niche VOD service.

CHAD McGHEE Knox City, TX



Christy Hemme was right about the TNA Knockouts. Bill Gorman agrees with Hemme that the ladies of TNA, such as So Cal Val and Traci Brooks, are more than eye candy the their WWE counterparts. These ladies have smarts too!

names makin news

By Harry Burkett

world in March, as Ernie Ladd, Bad News Allen, and Arnold Skoaland all died within the span of a week. Considering that Bam Bam Bigelow died in January and Mike Awesome died in February, 2007 is shaping up to be a sad year.

Ernie Ladd had been fighting cancer since 2004, first in his colon, and then his bones, and then his stomach. Ladd, who was 6'9" and 315 pounds in his prime, was a mountain of man. His family and friends weren't surprised that it took four years for cancer to conquer the gentle giant.

"The doctor told me I had three to six months to live," Ladd was quoted as saying in the Louisiana News-Star in 2005. "I told him Dr. Jesus has the verdict on me."

Born in Rayville, Texas, on November 28, 1938, Ladd grew tall and became an exceptional athlete. A standout defensive lineman for Grambling College, Ladd was selected 15th in the American Football League draft by the San Diego Chargers. He appeared in three AFL championship games, and helped the Chargers win the league title in 1963. He was elected to four consecutive AFL All-Star Games from 1962 to 1965, and later played with the Houston Oilers and Kansas City Chiefs.

Throughout his football career, Ladd wrestled during the off-season, much like fellow AFL player Wahoo McDaniel. Eventually, he gave up his football career for wrestling. It was in wrestling that he was nicknamed the "Big Cat."

Ladd used his long legs to his advantage in pro wrestling, achieving success with moves such as the big boot to the face and legdrop, both of which became staples of Hulk Hogan's repertoire. He also utilized a devastating thumb spike and forced opponents to surrender with his over-the-shoulder backbreaker.

Often touting himself as the "King Of Wrestling," Ladd wrestled from coast to coast, from the WWWF to Northern and Southern California. He was a heel most of the time. Ladd had a sentimental attachment to the fans in Texas and Louisiana and spent the latter part of his career as a top star and booker of the Mid-South territory.

Bill Watts, who was promoter of Mid-South at the time, posted the following statement on 1wrestling.com: "I love Ernie Ladd and am so privileged, so tremendously blessed to have that big giant of a man as my friend. He was big enough that I booked him in a singles match, one-on-one against Andre the Giant in the Superdome, and we had never done that before. He was a star-maker in the business. If he felt someone could become a star, he would sacrifice to make them one. He had great integrity. His word was his bond."

Throughout both of his sports careers, Ladd broke one racial barrier after another. When he was booker for Mid-South, he was considered the most powerful African-American in the business. Jim Ross, who worked with Ladd in Mid-South, alluded to this in a posting at his website, jrsbarbq.com: "Ernie taught me so much about wrestling psychology, how to handle talent/athletes, the intricacies of building a black superstar such as Junkyard Dog in that era, and gave me more info on race relations that I ever thought I would ever know."

Ladd's notoriously bad knees finally gave out in the mid-1980s, and he retired as a full-time wrestler in 1984. Active in Republican politics, he was a close friend of former President George H.W. Bush and former Secretary of State Colin Powell. He was a devout Christian for the final two decades of his life and served as a pastor in



Franklin, Louisiana. He was 68 at the time of his death on March 10. He is survived by wife of 45 years, Roslyn Ladd, four children, and over a dozen grandchildren.

Allen Coage, who wrestled as Bad News Brown in the WWF and as Bad News Allen everywhere else, died on March 6 in Calgary, Alberta. He was 63. A judo specialist who won a bronze medal at the 1976 Olympic Games in Montreal, Coage was trained for pro wrestling by Antonio Inoki. Coage was a New York native who eventually settled in Calgary during his feud with Bret Hart in Stampede Wrestling. He later feuded with Hart in the WWF and is best remembered for his battle royal

victory at WrestleMania IV. For more on the life of Coage, check out my "Blindsided" column on the flip side of this issue.

Arnold Skoaland—who spent virtually his entire career with WWE as a wrestler, manager, and even a minority owner at one point—died on March 13 at the age of 82. Known as the "Golden Boy," Skoaland had an extensive amateur background and was a solid mid-card attraction for the WWWF in the 1960s. He and Spiros Arion held the WWWF U.S. tag team title in 1967. Skoaland is probably more famous as the manager of WWF champions Bruno Sammartino and Bob Backlund in the 1970s

and '80s. He sparked controversy in 1983 when he saved Backlund from further punishment—but forfeited the WWF title—by throwing in the towel during his match against The Iron'Sheik.

Is the brand extension disintegrating or is it simply a smart business move? On March 14, WWE announced that all future pay-per-views would include talent from Raw, Smackdown, and ECW. Although WWE's "big four" pay-per-views—The Royal Rumble, WrestleMania, SummerSlam, and Survivor Series—have always been multi-brand events, Vince McMahon decided that it no longer made sense to have PPVs dedicated to single brands, such as Raw's Backlash, Smackdown's Great American Bash, and ECW's December to Dismember.

While this may seem like a sign of desperation, it is most likely a pragmatic decision based on dollars and cents. Then again, the buy rates for The Royal Rumble, WrestleMania, SummerSlam, and Survivor Series could drop if the novelty of multibrand PPVs wears off. We'll have to wait and see.

"We have seen over the past two years that WWE pay-per-views have significantly better buy rates when more than one WWE brand is involved," stated **Kurt Schneider**, WWE's executive vice president of marketing. "WrestleMania, with an average of one million buys per event over the past three years, is the perfect example. This new direction will give our fans more of what they want in every one of our pay-per-views."

Is TNA giving fans what they want? Based on the events that occurred at Destination X, the answer would have to be no. Why do I say that? Because Christian Cage is still the NWA World champion.

On the other hand, Cage's title defense against Samoa Joe turned out to be an excellent match. Amid chants of "Joe's gonna kill you," Cage employed a clever counter-wrestling strategy, escaping muscle busters, crossfaces, and rear naked chokes. True, Cage did try to walk out of the match, but a number of X division wrestlers surrounded the ring to make sure that didn't happen. But, for someone who was begging Tomko, Scott Steiner, and Abyss for help



during the weeks leading up to the match, Cage hung tough with Joe for 19 minutes. The end came when Joe attempted to apply a rear-naked choke, but Cage rolled him over into a bridge and scored the pinfall with his feet on the ropes.

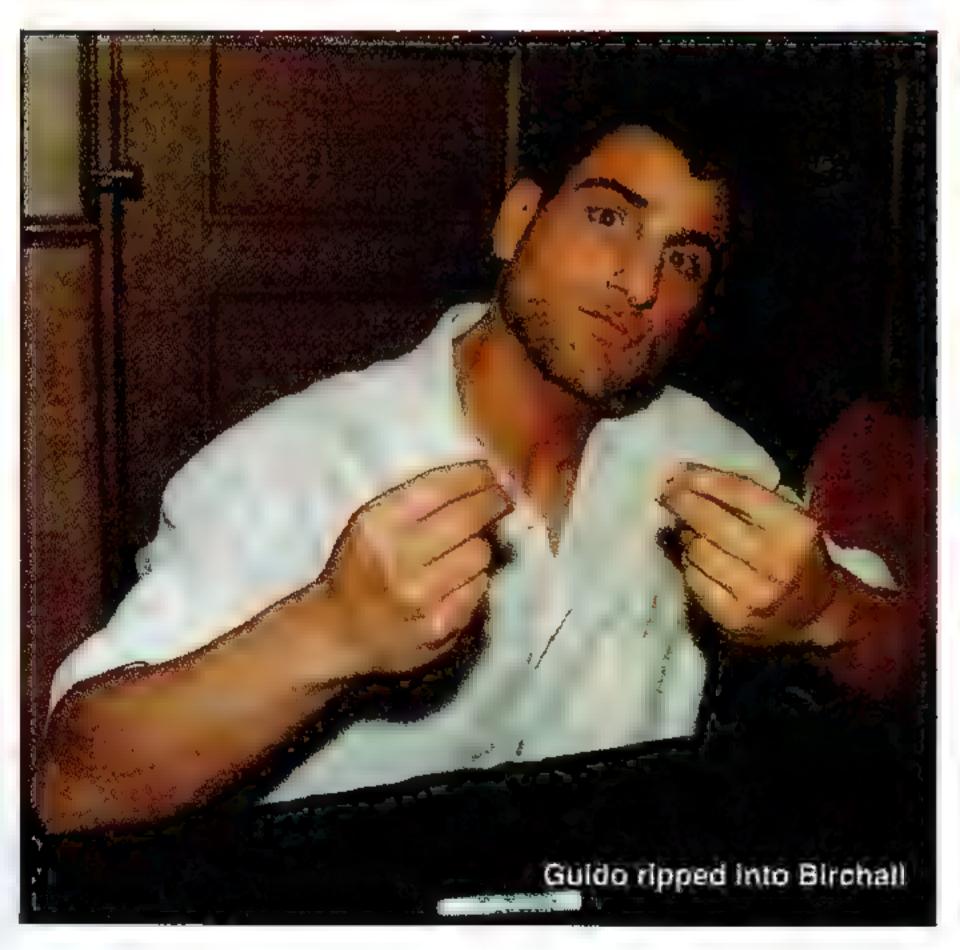
No, that wasn't a clean victory, but—by Cage's standards—it was impressive.

Yet fans weren't very happy about it. The crowd in the Impact Zone also vocalized its displeasure during **Sting**'s "Last Rites" casket match against Abyss. They grew tired of Sting and Abyss' attempts to awkwardly place each other in the casket, and outright booed when Sting used his baseball bat to smash a tombstone in Abyss' face. Chants for "Fire Russo" emanated from the crowd. Mercifully, Sting won the match in only 10 minutes. Similarly, after **Kurt Angle** defeated **Scott Steiner**, the fans chanted, "This is weak!"

However, fans were very enthusiastic about the twoout-of-three-falls match pitting X division champion Chris Sabin against Jerry Lynn earlier on the show. Lynn neutralized Sabin with a headlock for much of the first fall, countered most of Sabin's offense, and exploded with a tornado DDT to score a pinfall. In the second fall, the champion caught Lynn in the corner with a power bomb and placed his feet on the ropes to leverage a pin. Fans chanted "T-N-A" throughout the first two falls.

The mood changed during the third fall. Lynn had just planted Sabin with a Celtic cross when someone wearing a Sting mask jumped on the ring apron and distracted him. That enabled Sabin to surprise Lynn with the cradle shock to score the winning fall and retain the X division title.

Also of note at Destination X, Rhino beat A.J. Styles in an "Elevation X" match ... The Voodoo Kin Mafia beat Romeo Roselli & Antonio Thomas ... Senshi defeated Austin Starr in a chicken wing-submission match ... James Storm & Jackie Moore beat Petey



NEWS ANALYSIS

have learned over the past few days, Ernie Ladd was a great wrestler and even greater human being. He overcame racial obstacles and almost debilitating knee problems during his active wrestling career and still made a point to help others, both in wrestling and the community. If anyone has secured a place in the Great Beyond, it is Ladd.

ARBOLD THROWS IN THE TOWEL That's a tongue-in-cheek reference to the irony of Arnoid Skoaland's career. Skoaland was a terrific wrestler and important figure behind the scenes in the old WWWF, but he will be forever known for throwing in the towel, causing Bob Backlund to lose the WWF title to the hated Iron Sheik Arnie was a buddy to all the wrestlers he knew, and they—along with his family—will miss him dearly. WWE'S THREE-IN-ONE DEAL Some people will read a lot of gloom and doom into WWE's decision to feature Raw, Smackdown, and ECW wrestlers in all 12 of its annual pay-per-views. I take it as a good sign, however, because WWE doesn't have to treat the separation between the brands as sacred. WWE no longer has to manufacture competition for itself. It has legitimate competition, and that's TNA.

have turned out to be a discerning bunch. At one time, I was worried that Universal Studios—home to the Impact Zone—would appeal primarily to tourists, much like WCW Worldwide, which taped at Universal in the early-1990s, Instead, the TNA crowd is comprised of diehards who chant 'T-N-A' when the company deserves it, and chant "This is weak!" when the situation calls for it.

Melby attended an awards ceremony held at the George Tragos/Lou Thesz Hall of Fame in lowal Melby was completely unaware that he was about to receive a new award that recognized the contributions of wrestling journalists and historians. Appropriately, he was the first recipient of the James C. Melby Award. It's good to know that his work was recognized during his lifetime.

Williams & Gail Kim ... NWA World tag team champions The Latin American Exchange defeated Team 3D in a non-title bout.

Wonder what happened to Little Guido? The former member of The Full-Blooded Italians debuted on the March 10 edition of Ohio Valley's weekly program and immediately received a shot at heavyweight champion Paul Birchall. Guido unleashed an intense offensive

assault on Birchall, repeatedly going for pin attempts in the early going. "The Ripper" was able to overpower Guido on several occasions, but often fell prey to his high-impact moves and mat-grappling skills.

Guido connected with a missile dropkick from the second rope, yet-again-scored only a two-count. The indomitable Birchall grabbed Guido, threw him face-first against the ropes, executed a vertical suplex, and dropped him with a jumping neckbreaker to gain the pinfall.

News from Northeast Wrestling: The Ron Zombie-Texas Outlaw feud may be the hottest rivalry in the Connecticut-based promotion ... Jerry Lawler and Jim Neidhart recently formed a tag team for this promotion. Talk about a veteran tandem! ... Four years after Samoa Joe's historic Ring of Honor title victory over Xavier, Joe beat Xavier by disqualification in a rematch held in Danbury.

This 'n' that: Because Spike TV executives are happy with Impacts average rating of 1.0, TNA management is hopeful that the program could earn a two-hour time slot this fall ... The Briscoe Brothers defeated Christopher Daniels and Matt Sydal for the Ring of Honor tag team title, only to lose the belts to Naruki Doi and Shingo a week later ... Ruckus and Sabian retained their CZW tag team belts at an MCW show in Dundalk, Maryland, when local favorite Derek Frazier turned against his partner, Alex Shelley ... Erick Stevens beat his mentor, Full-Impact Pro champion Roderick Strong, in the tournament final of the "Eddie Graham Memorial Battle Of The Belts" in Crystal River, Florida.

From the Slightly Smaller Show Dept.: There's latebreaking news regarding The Big Show, who hasn't appeared for WWE since losing a match to ECW champion Bobby Lashley on December 4. His WWE contract expired in early-March, and he has not signed a renewal. Furthermore, he turned down an offer regarding intellectual property rights, which would allow WWE to continue using his likeness.

Meanwhile, friends say The Big Show has lost a considerable amount of weight since leaving WWE because he's better able work out and watch his diet while not on the road. There's also news regarding Big Show's smoking, which was so notorious in WCW that Creative turned it into a storyline. He claims to have sworn off cancer sticks forever.

Before we part, I will have to end this column on yet another sad note. James C. Melby, a noted wrestling author, publisher, and historian, passed away on February 11 at age 57. He began writing about wrestling at age 15 and contributed to several magazines and newsletters, including The Wrestling News, Wrestling Revue, and Wrestling Monthly. He also wrote two books, Mat Wars in 1985 with Verne Gagne, and Gopherland Grappling: The Early Years, a pictorial history of Minnesota wrestling, in 2006. Melby had been battling diabetes for 35 years and lost both legs and a kidney to the disease. Friends considered him an inspiration, and he will be missed.



CEESIGES!

MATTISTATION

HEIGHT 5'10" WEIGHT 215

HOMETOWN: Bayside, NY

GREATEST MOMENT TO DATE

December 19, 2006—pinning Manoney on ECW's weekly program. Striker had just lost a "Striker's Rules" match which restricted eye-gouging, hair pulling, top-rope moves, and foul language—to Mahoney at December to Dismember, but this clean win restored his reputation.

HE DOES IT SO WELL. With his argyle sweaters and too-tight wrestling tights. Striker's very presence is an affront to the ECW faithful. He has also done an excellent job of pariaying his real-life scandal—being fired as a teacher because he skipped school to compete on Smackdown and in Japan—into his wrestling persona.

WHERE HE NEEDS TO IMPROVE: If
Striker is going to survive in a war with
the ECW Originals, he must become
more intense in the ring. He tends to
stick with a pre-planned strategy during
his bouts, and that has harmed him
greatly in matches held under extreme
rules.

PET FINISHER: Double-knee backbreaker

BIGGEST TEST TO DATE: Striker has wrestled C.M. Punk several times in ECW but has tailed to pin him cleanly He scored a tainted victory over Punk on ECW television by using his feet on the ropes as leverage. If Striker can pin Punk with an old trick like that, is it unthinkable that he could actually pin Punk cleanly? He should give it a chance OUTLOOK FOR 2007. As part of ECW's New Breed faction. Striker has a chance to become a leader. While it seems that Vince McMahon has unofficially made Elijah Burke the spokesman for the group, Striker has become Burke's trusty lieutenani

OUICKIE EXPERT ANAL YSIS: There's no denying that Striker is a very talented young man. He just needs to learn how to turn it up a notch: don't hold back and stop wearing those damn tights!

Hardcore Holly



OTHER ROECT With Dave !enker

O YOU REALIZE that we're going on 10 years since the beginning of perhaps the greatest wrestling feud ever? At its height, Vince McMahon vs. Steve Austin was that special.

Ten years since Austin and Bret Hart saved WrestleMania XIII from being pretty much a disaster by giving us a gritty "I Quit" match. Ten years since Austin began to emerge as an anti-hero, then became a full-fledged fan favorite, then was nearly paralyzed by a frighteningly botched Owen Hart tombstone piledriver. Ten years since McMahon tried to keep Austin out of the ring for his own good, only to get physically assaulted by Austin for his troubles.

I got to thinking about all of this as I sat inside the Save Mart Center in Fresno and listened as Donald Trump chose Bobby Lashley as his representative at WrestleMania 23. (Note to WWE: There was something wrong with Trump revealing the identity of his protege on Raw after he had discussed it on Don Imus' syndicated radio show—and struggled to think of Lashley's name).

My first trip to Fresno—or at least I think it was (I've obviously covered far too many WWE shows over the past 14 years)—and I'm daydreaming during a very hot Raw. I was hoping "Stone-Cold" would be announced as the guest referee for the Lashley-Umaga 'Mania match, but that poorly kept secret was held for seven more days.

A small but vocal group of Fresno State students sitting nearby was hoping for the same thing, but their Austin chants died out quickly.

How many other logical choices for the guest ref spot were there, really? Pick your legend. Hulk Hogan? He was penciled in for the Lashley spot, so no. The Rock? Excellent choice, but he says he's through with wrestling. Mick Foley? Maybe. But with Austin's new movie, The Condemned, about to be released, he got the nod, and, well, the finish of Lashley-Umaga suddenly became crystal-clear to all of us six weeks ahead of time.

Still, I felt underwhelmed when I first heard of Austin's involvement and even when he first reappeared in front of a live WWE crowd. I remember reading somewhere a few years ago that the average fan wasn't sure how to react to Austin anymore because it seemed as if he was no longer a wrestler (although he never did make that announcement on WWE TV), but he wasn't around enough to earn the true legend (read: Hogan) treatment. He was in a very strange limbo. Still is.

It's been four years since Austin's last match, but we've since seen him as the co-GM of Raw, the sheriff of Raw, and even in a beer-drinking duel with JBL, and it was hard to figure out what to think of all that.

The toughest S.O.B. in WWE history



reduced to a comedy figure who could still be counted on for the odd stunner and extended middle finger here and there but not much else. Austin can be a very funny guy. We witnessed that many times in his feud with Vince, but his humor in years past seemed more natural and not at all contrived. He had a clever wit, but he didn't exactly attempt comedy in the mid- to late-1990s.

Hogan tends to come back for meaningful matches and feuds. If we erase a hastily arranged match with Carlito a couple of autumns ago, Foley only returns for feuds on his terms, feuds that will mean something to him and leave his foe better off when he disappears again. If Dwayne Johnson ever can be wooed back, I get the feeling it would be only for something truly special.

I'm not sure Austin is tainting his legacy, which should be forever safe, but his occasional appearances lack substance. WWE financial reports likely indicate otherwise, but Austin in small bursts doesn't work for me. Maybe it's because during his prime—the kind of prime few wrestlers could even dream of enjoying—he was the regular guy hero who seemed to really be the man we saw on our TVs every Monday night. Since his retirement, he seems more like a guy trying to be "Stone-Cold" again and trying so hard to entertain us. Today's "Stone-Cold" seems like a caricature of the "Stone-Cold" of a decade ago.

Austin vs. McMahon is now stale, even if years go by between chapters. What once felt like whitehot true hatred feels more like nostalgic hatred, an almost-campy kind of "Yeah, it's me again, Vince"type hatred. As an aside, I wonder exactly how many stunners. Vince has eaten since that crazy night during the fall of 1997 inside Madison Square Garden in which the "Texas Rattlesnake" menacingly circled his unlikely prey and sank his freshly sharpened fangs into him for the first time.

I don't know what Austin's future plans are in regard to wrestling. More of the kind of stuff we've seen intermittently over the past four years? Anything at all? Does Austin even know, or does it all depend on his mood the next time a call from Stamford comes in?

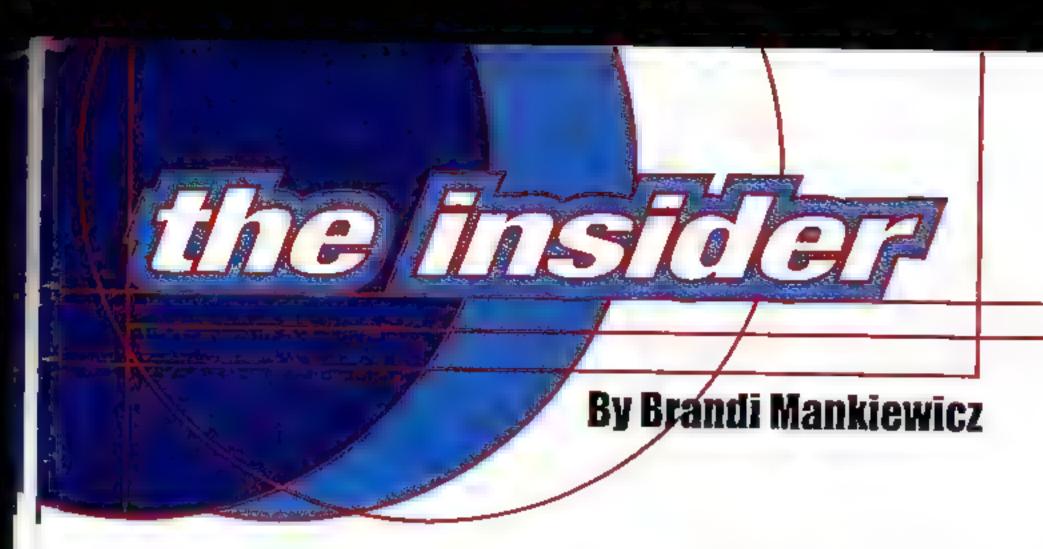
When I originally heard the rumors of a proposed Austin-Hogan match for last year's WrestleMania, I was on the side of those who didn't want to see it. Now I'm not so sure. It might never happen for any number of reasons. Austin has been reluctant to put his badly damaged



Like "Stone-Cold," The Rock's return to in-ring action would be an extraordinary event. But unlike Hulk Hogan, neither man seems anxious to lace the boots for an actual match anytime soon.

neck at risk in the ring. Who can blame him? But if he is going to stick around WWE and make however occasional appearances, I would like to see his presence build to something of substance.

A match pitting arguably the two biggest stars in WWF/E history against each other may be the perfect way to end his and Hogan's careers. If that isn't going to happen, it's time for Austin to take his place on the stage during a WrestleMania weekend, let Vince himself induct him into the Hall of Fame, then deliver one last stunner to the boss and bid wrestling a final farewell.



(The opinions expressed in "The Insider" are those of Brandi Mankiewicz alone and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of anyone else on the staff of this magazine.)

TU SAKS MUST be a god. There's a voice mail on my cell phone and I know it's him. Caller ID is a beautiful thing. The voice will be stern yet hopeful that I'll have a column done for this issue. I've had to write a column for about two weeks now, but I can't. Don't know why. There seems to be a multitude of column ideas for me, but unfortunately, after mulling over several options, I've come up short on all of them—by about 300 or so words. Usually my word counts aren't the problem. I routinely overshoot my allotted word count by a few hundred extras.

Vince put his coif on the line at WrestleMania 23 against Donald Trump. How fascinating does he think his mop is? Now, Linda's hair—that's worth \$49.95 to see on the ring mat.

Maybe I've used up my supply of verbosity. But that isn't why I think Stu is a god, though. His godlike stature springs forth from what I like to call the Ellner curse.

Certainly, the Ellner curse didn't start with my predecessor, Eddie Ellner, but he's a great example of it. Before I took over my reign of the dark side, Ellner was king of all things nefarious—including missing deadlines. It was always up to Stu, our good shepherd, to sweat out the possibility of Ellner's column not showing up. Of course, a column always did appear on Stu's doorstep at the very last minute. Yep, as I sit here in the snowy Poconos, I'm pulling an Ellner myself, right down to almost 200 words of stuff that doesn't involve wrestling.

So I digress ...

Since I can't think of one damn lengthy topic, I'm just going to rattle off the few things I had in mind, Dave Lenker style.

TOPIC NUMBER ONE: VINCE MCMAHON'S HAIR

Yep, I've been oh-so-fascinated by his fascination with it. Okay, I lie. The only thing I care less about is Donald Trump's hair. While I'd love to see Vinny Mac shine up a chrome dome of his own, it's just not something I really need to have drawn out for weeks on end. Where's the shock value when the subject has been beaten to death? Now, if Vince were to lose his WrestleMania bet (if it isn't obvious to you yet, I'm writing this before the event) and Linda were to get her head shaved, well then, that would be shockingespecially if it didn't end in divorce. (Note to Vince: You forsook a big payday of surprise just to barker endlessly for the show. This bet ends at Wrestle-Mania. It's already your biggest and best pay-perview each year. Wrestling fans expect to see something big, but the expectation of shock itself is greater than the expectation of a hairless Vince.)

TOPIC NUMBER TWO: AWESOME HAIR IN WRESTLING HISTORY

Yes, our great sport has had its share of fun hairstyles. Some might look good on Vince. Others, not so much. While Vince's current obsession is to look more like Christopher Daniels, I have a few suggestions for him. Why not Bobby Eaton? That extreme mullet made the southern gals swoon so often that Bobby opted to keep it. Hey, it's business in the front

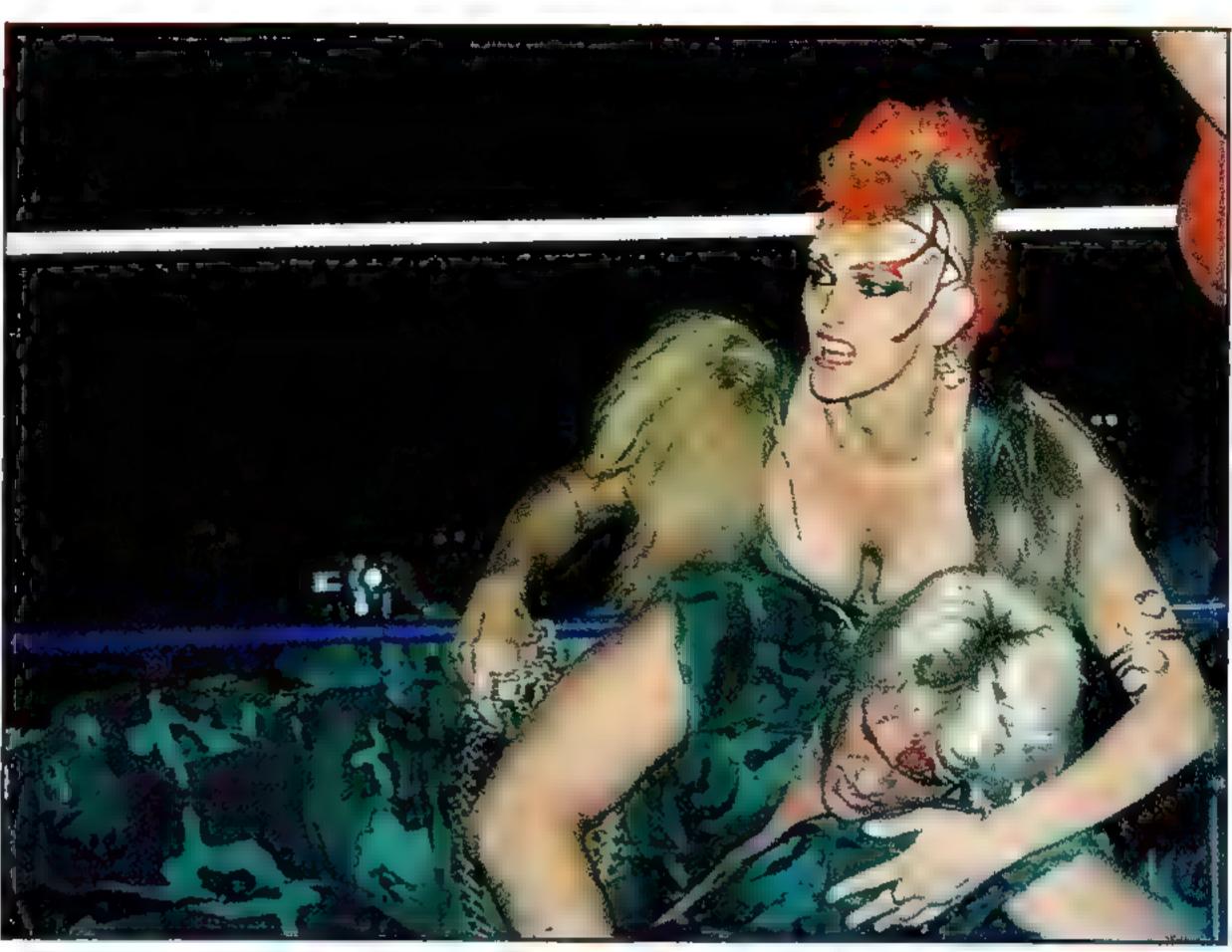
and party in the back, right? How can one not love that mullet? If the Eaton mullet doesn't do it for ya, how about the awesome hair of Lady Maxxine? That mohawk was about the only alluring aspect of this broad. Of course, I can't mention bad hair without mentioning the absolute worst look for someone of his stature: Hulk Hogan. The updated monk 'do did nothing to help his popularity. Hell, it still does nothing for him. I've always wondered why his wife or kids don't just shave him while he sleeps. I'm sure at his age sleep happens almost every hour, right along with his diaper changes.

TOPIC NUMBER THREE: AWESOMEST HAIR ON MONDAY NIGHTS

Unfortunately, you morons will be forced to flip channels at 9 p.m. for this one. The best Monday hair goes to Digging For The Truth host Josh Bernstein. That's on the History Channel. It seems that when the channel isn't clogged with World War II footage, they put this hunky nerd on to entice me into caring about the Mayan civilization. Don't worry, I'm enticed. I've always loved history-wanted to be an archaeologist as a kid-but Josh has made me learn to love history a little more. I can't wait until he's digging for the truth about wrestling. I'll offer up my expert advice in a flash.

TOPIC NUMBER FOUR: WORST HAIR ON MONDAY NIGHTS

This can be settled with one word: Melina. Her hair "fashion" is fugly. Yes, fugly is a word in this instance. It's a superlative combination of my favorite F-word and, well, ugly. The only saving grace of



If Lady Maxine had her hair shaved, what would she have left to look at? (Easy, guys.) The man she's with in this 1986 photo is Jack Victory, and I'm not sure if that's blood over his eye or if it's Maxine's hair dye.

Melina's hair is that it detracts from her equally fugly face.

TOPIC NUMBER FIVE: PENNSYLVANIA WINTERS

Now, it might come as a shock to most of you, but it snows here in PA. Apparently, that little tidbit isn't privy to the fine employees of the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation. For the second time in a few weeks, I'm snowed in thanks to these fine men and women forgetting that snow must be cleared from the roadways in order for people to get to work. One would think that after the 2007 Valentine's Day Massacre that left three of our major interstate roadways shut down and impassible for days, this lovely transportation department would do its best to clear the roads in a timely fashion. Nope. Not even my Jeep Grand Cherokee Laredo is moving today.

Too much ice. I love winter, but I can't wait for spring.

TOPIC NUMBER SIX: WRESTLING SOCIETY X

The on again, off again MTV wrestling show bores me as much as any Torrie Wilson appearance. While it's an interesting opportunity for independent wrestlers, I'm not sold. The upside is that it shows just how good TNA really is. The downside is that it's just a rehashed West Coast pipedream that smacks of Rob Black's old promotion. You know the one. It's where porn money bankrolls the company, but the lack of true talent only leaves you feeling screwed in the end. I'd rather watch Bam's Unholy Union.

TOPIC NUMBER SEVEN: I'M FINISHED

I'm going back to bed.

Capsula pointila



N THE SUMMER of 2006, Andrew "Test" Martin returned to WWE television after a long absence, referring to himself as "God's gift to ECW." Though Test has never been associated with the extreme style, his rise to main-event status on the ECW brand is the capstone to a decade of competition ... First appeared on WWF television as a security guard for Motley Crue ... Joined the WWF as an in-ring competitor in December 1998 ... Joined Vince McMahon's Corporation as a bodyguard for The Rock Fired from The Corporation, and joined The Union with The Big Show, Ken Shamrock, and Mankind ... Feuded with the newly christened Corporate Ministry ... Began relationship with Stephanie McMahon, earning McMahon ... Defeated Shane at SummerSlam 1999, win-

ning the right to date Stephanie ... Proposed to Stephanie ... Feuded with Triple-H after "The Game" drugged and married Stephanie, stealing her away ... Won the WWF hardcore championship from Big Bossman in January 2000 ... Lost the hardcore title to Hardcore Holly in February 2000 ... Formed T&A with Albert, and was managed by Trish Stratus ... He and Albert split at the end of 2000 ... Won the WWF European championship from William Regal in January 2001 ... Defended the European title against former Radicals Eddie Guerrero and Dean Malenko ... Lost European title and won the hardcore belt from Perry Saturn in June 2001 ... Lost the belt to Rhyno four days later ... Joined



the ire of Shane and Vince Since entering the revived ECW brand, Test had several McMahon ... Defeated Shane opportunities at Bobby Lashley's ECW title. Now that WWE has released Test, he will have to set new goals.

the WCW/ECW Alliance by helping Chris Kanyon and Dallas Page win the WWF World tag team championship ... Shane and Stephanie McMahon led The Alliance ... With Booker T, defeated The Undertaker and Kane for the WCW World tag team championship in late-September 2001 ... Lost the belts to The Hardy Boyz three weeks later ... Won both the WWF World tag team championship (with Booker T) and the Intercontinental title in November 2001 ... Lost the WWF World tag team championship to The Hardy Boyz and the I-C belt to Edge ... The Alliance dissolved at Survivor Series 2001 ... Drafted to Smackdown in 2002 ... Joined Lance Storm and Christian in The Un-Americans, a

controversial anti-American faction ... Returned to Raw ... Managed by Stacy Keibler after The Un-Americans split up at the end of 2002 ... Stacy nicknamed his fans "Testicles" ... Teamed with Scott Steiner for a brief while ... Feuded with Scott Steiner over the rights to Stacy's managerial services ... Won Stacy and Steiner as "personal slaves" ... Became involved in a real-life, short-term relationship with Stacy ... Abused WWE Divas Trish, Stacy, and Victoria ... Injured his neck in early-2004 ... Released from WWE ... Legally changed name to Andrew "Test" Martin for rights to wrestle with the name Test ... Wrestled on several independent shows, including World Series Wrestling, facing Samoa Joe in a series of matches ... Returned to WWE, wrestling dark matches before Raw and Smackdown tapings in early-2006 ... Joined the ECW brand

in July 2006 ... Defeated Al Snow in his ECW debut ... Teamed briefly with Mike Knox ... Wrestled on The Big Show's team at Survivor Series 2006 ... Was one of the combatants in the "Extreme Elimination Chamber" at ECW's December to Dismember ... Fought Bobby Lashley for the ECW title twice in one week (on ECW's weekly program and at the Royal Rumble), losing both matches ... Suspended by WWE for 30 days in February 2007 for Wellness Program violations ... Days after that announcement, WWE dropped a bombshell by wishing Test "the best in his future endeavors" ... Now the future is unclear for the big man: Will he go to TNA, find work in Japan, or fade into obscurity?





whateverhappened to --

By Scott Teal

LORD LITTLEBROOK



ord Littlebrook doesn't care whether you refer to him as a midget or one of the little people. "I made a good living in wrestling as a midget," he said, "so it's all the same to me. My doctor classifies me as a little man, and you should hear some of the names my ex-wives have called me."

Born in London, England, young Eric Tovey had many health problems as a child. "I had asthma and bronchitis, so my parents sent me to a health school called Hazelbury Open Air," recalled Tovey. "Since the war was going on, my mom kept me home most of the time, so I don't have much education."

His small size didn't keep him from having a full life. "I was six-foot in my dad's eyes. He told me, 'If somebody calls you a midget, or a dwarf, or short legs, or big head, or whatever, just don't pay no attention to it.' But I had friends everywhere I went."

When Tovey was 14 years old, he was only 3'6" and weighed less than 70 pounds. "I would go to factories, trying to find a job. They would say, 'I'm sorry. Come back when you grow up!' I got tired of that. When the circus came to town, I asked my dad if I could join it. After giving me some advice, he gave me permission to go."

His first job in the circus wasn't very glamorous. "I peeled potatoes. They had about 25 working men to feed, so I had to peel a 50-pound bag of potatoes every day. My little hands could hardly hold a potato."

Tovey eventually joined the Lord John Sanger Circus, where he was offered a job as a clown. "Three of us put a tumbling act together and called ourselves the Tumble Letty Brothers. We did hand-to-hand balancing, head-to-head balancing, somersaults from one guy's shoulders to another."

After one season, Tovey met a talent scout from the United States and signed on to a ship bound for Halifax, Nova Scotia. From there, he traveled by train to New York, then on to Louisville, Kentucky, by bus. "When I got off the bus, all I had was \$5 in my pocket. I spent two years with the circus in the States. The first was with Stringers, then we went with Hamid-Morton Shrine Circus."

During a workout in New York at Bothner's Gym on 42nd Street, Tovey met a man who made a strange offer. The man asked, "Have you ever thought about bein' a wrestler?" *Oh, this guy's joking,* Tovey thought. "Yeah, I think about it all the time," replied Tovey. The man insisted he was serious. The next day, he intro-



Got ya nose! Lord Littlebrook grabs Little Bruiser by the nose at the Olympic Auditorium in June 1971. Because of his aristocratic persona, Littlebrook usually wrestled as a heel in his matches.

duced Tovey to Jack Britton, the promoter who pioneered midget wrestling.

Tovey wrestled Major Tom Thumb in his first match. Britton came up with the idea of making Tovey an aristocrat. Tovey responded, "Hell, if anything, I'm a peasant. I'm not a Lord! I come from the rough part of London. But that's what he wanted. That's how I became Lord Littlebrook."

"Brook," as he is known to his friends, eventually left Britton and went to work for Gust Karras in St. Joseph, Missouri. "When I went out on my own, I took three boys with me: Bull Brummell, Cowboy Bradley, and Tiny Roe. I did my own booking and got a percentage from what my crew of guys was paid. I got along real good with most of the big guys. A few of them didn't want anything to do with the midgets, but that's okay. Most of them were nice to us, like Red Bastien. He was a sweetheart."

Littlebrook still stays in touch with those old friends. "Red Bastien calls me every month. And, once in a while, someone will call to ask if I need or have any wrestlers."

In the early-1990s, Little-brook managed Jack Victory and Rip Morgan, who were known as The Royal Family in World Championship Wrestling. Since then, he has trained several little people, but has been plagued by health problems, including the usual ailments that nag veteran wrestlers. "I never had no problem with my knees, but I have a hip problem. I'm happy to say I've had very few injuries."

For most of his career, Brook weighed less than 118 pounds. "Today, I weigh 145. My kids call me Porky." Aside from owning a gym, Littlebrook enjoys fishing and staying in touch with friends from the wrestling business. (Scott Teal publishes the newsletter "Whatever Happened To ...?" He can be reached at P.O. Box 2781, Hendersonville, TN 37077-2781. Web site: www.1wrestlinglegends.com.)

DEIDSUERING

With Matt Brock

Harder than nails,
veteran wrestling reporter
Matt Brock has logged more
miles covering wrestling
than any other journalist.
Every month Matt will travel
to the sport's hotheds,
reporting everything he sees
without fear or favor

tended a Ring of Honor card here tonight and spent half the night double-checking the travel plans Saks booked for me. Leave it to Saks to go the cheapskate route and book me a seven-hour redeye flight to the West Coast taking off less than two hours after the last scheduled match. And given Ring of Honor's reputation for 30-plus minute mainevent matches—and the Philly airport's habit of having only one security screener on duty whenever

Matt Brock has a flight--- I spent more time worrying about making my flight than I did enjoying the matches. ¶Samoa Joe wrestled what was billed as his farewell match, scoring a win over Jimmy Rave. It looks like Joe is going to focus entirely on TNA, and I say it's about time. Joe is the most successful wrestler in ROH history, but it's time for him to move on. A wrestler of his ability needs national exposure and TNA needs him. The thing is Joe has been without the ROH title for more than two years now and, in my notso-humble opinion, the company has yet to find a wrestler able to replace him. ROH is a ship without a captain. I thought Homicide had potential to

bring some swagger back to the championship, and then tonight he drops the strap to a Pro Wrestling NOAH refugee by the name of Takeshi Morishima. Morishima isn't going to replace Joe, and neither is KENTA. The company is in dire need of a new superstar, especially now that Joe is gone. But I can't complain. Morishima's quick win gave me plenty of time to make it to Philly International for my flight out west.

LOS ANGELES, CA: Bobby Lashley snapped at No Way Out tonight, and that's a good thing. I've been high on Bobby for a long time now, but I've been waiting to see the kid show a little bit of spark, some killer spirit. He may have the body of an Adonis (reminds me of a young Matt Brock back in my salad days, if I do say so myself), but from the neck up he still looks like he would get carded buying cigarettes. If he's going to survive in ECW-even a watered-down, decidedly less hardcore version—he's going to have to toughen up. ¶Ken Kennedy awakened a monster tonight. I swear I think I might have seen a few hairs spring up on Bobby's chest as he was smashing that steel chair into Kennedy's skull. If Lashley learns to get in touch with his aggression, he has the potential to be one of the alltime greats. But first he's going to have to change his ring name—seriously, who can be intimidated by a guy named Bobby?

BAKERSFIELD, CA: Matt Brock has been all around this great big world of ours, but every time I come to California, I feel like I'm walking around on a different planet. Forty-year-old women with brand new breasts. Young girls carrying miniature dogs around in their



BOB(BY) LASHLEY

handbags. Sometimes it's hard to tell the pedestrians from the vacanteyed waifs staring out from the billboards. ¶Normally, after a few hours out here, I'm hankering for the cool confines of the wrestling arena. I've spent a very significant portion of my adult life breathing in the musky aroma of wrestling. The wrestling arena is home. Or at least I thought it was. But a little bit of La-La Land crept into the arena tonight when Vince McMahon continued his ridiculous personal vendetta against Donald Trump. ¶You know the story. The Donald agreed to put his famous follicles on the line at WrestleMania. McMahon selected Umaga to represent him, which is a darn good choice. But Trump trumped Vinnie Mac by choosing Bob Lashley (if he's not going to change it, I'm going to change it for him). ¶By the time you read this, of course, the match itself will be history. But more important than whose hair will have ended up on the canvas, I'd bet good money (is there any other kind?) that WrestleMania will be remembered as Lashley's starting point to superstardom in this business.

SAN DIEGO, CA: For the first time since WWE brought ECW back from the great beyond, there is finally a feud to get excited about. The ECW Originals faction of Sandman, Tommy Dreamer, Sabu, and Rob Van Dam are at war with the so-called New Breed of Kevin Thorn, Marcus Cor Von, Matt Striker, and Elijah Burke. A similar generational clash took place in the dying days of WCW around 2000 when a bunch of upstarts calling themselves the New Blood took on the company's veterans who were dubbed the Millionaires Club. It was an exciting time when young talent



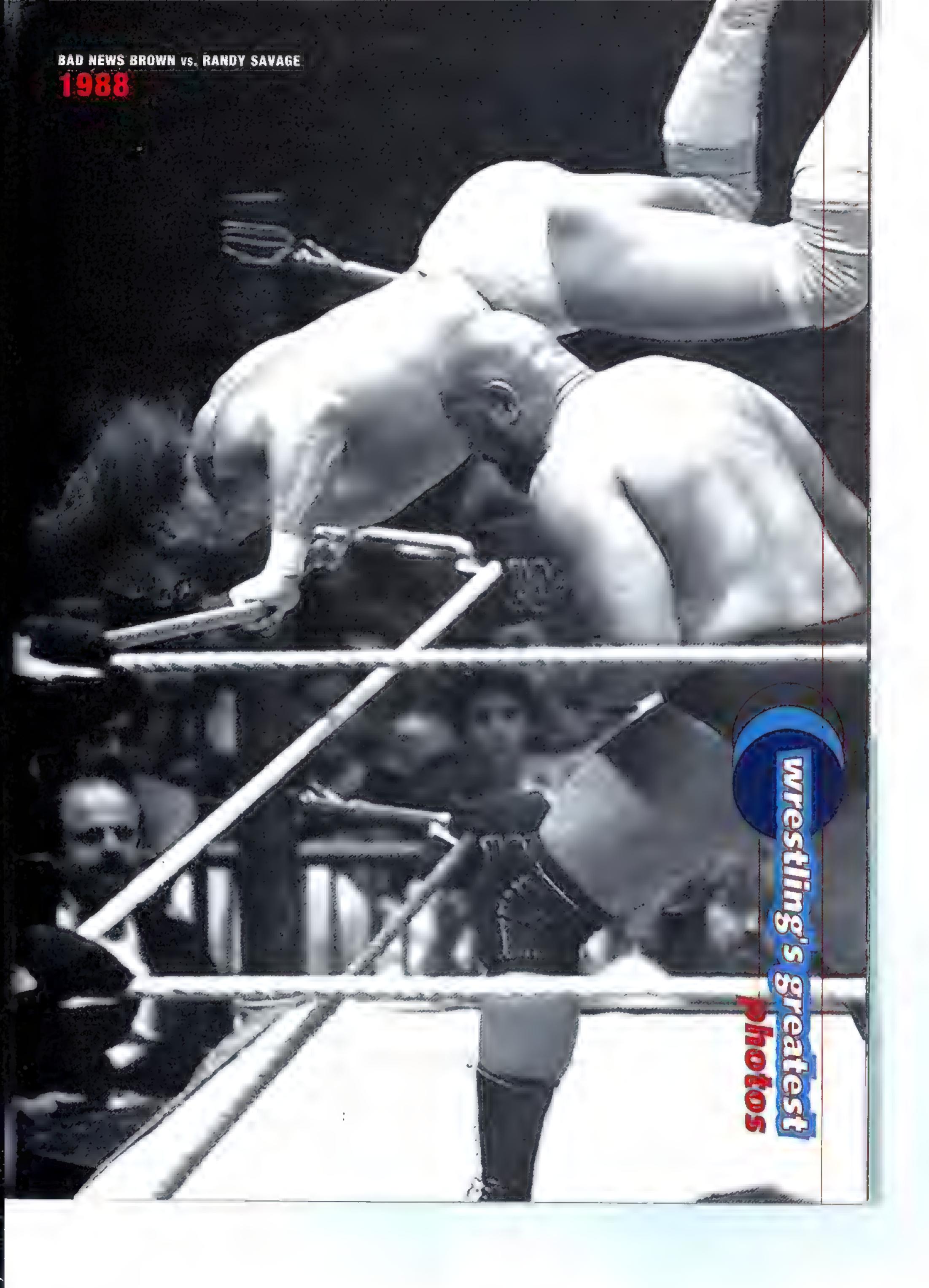
ELIJAH BURKE

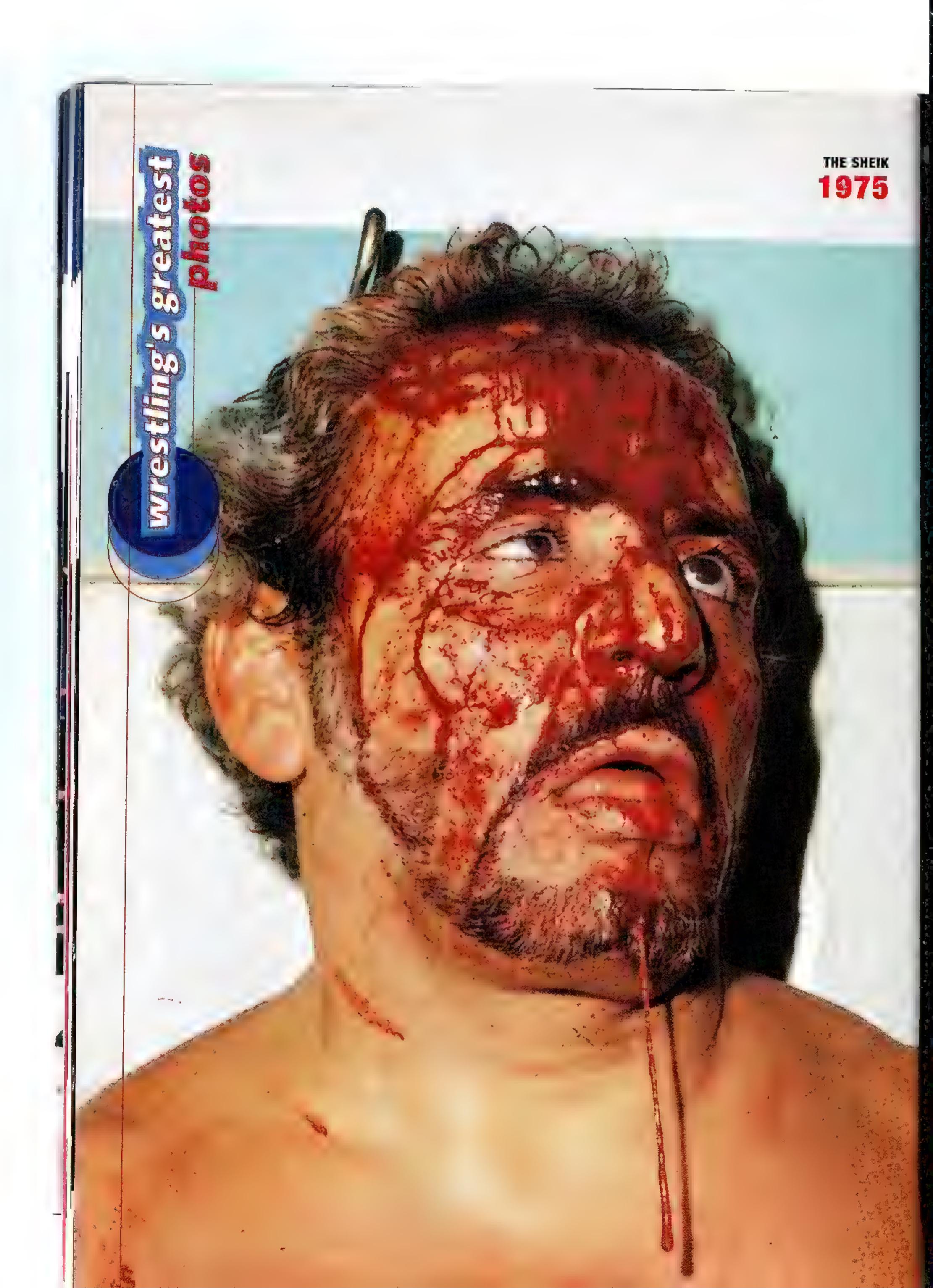
such as Billy Kidman, Vampiro, and The Natural Born Thrillers took on Hulk Hogan, Kevin Nash, "Diamond" Dallas Page, and others. Unfortunately, the New Blood never mounted much of a challenge to the Millionaires. By the time the dust cleared, the Establishment was still in charge, and the New Blood was sent off with their tails between their legs. That's why I'm pulling for the New Breed to win out over the golden oldies. Even saddled with a ridiculous name, Monty Brown has world title potential. Burke is a natural athlete and one of the most

determined athletes I've ever seen. Striker is one of the most underrated wrestlers and talkers in the sport. Thorn doesn't do much for me, but I admit I have to double up on the blood pressure meds once Ariel makes her ring entrance. ¶In other words, the New Breed is good for ECW. The ECW Originals had their time. I'm not saying they should hang up the boots. I'm just saying it's good to see some new faces near the top of the ECW card. This is 2007, not 1997 after all. (Take that, all of you who complain that of Matt lives in the past!)

ERNIE LADD VS. RICK STEAMBOAT



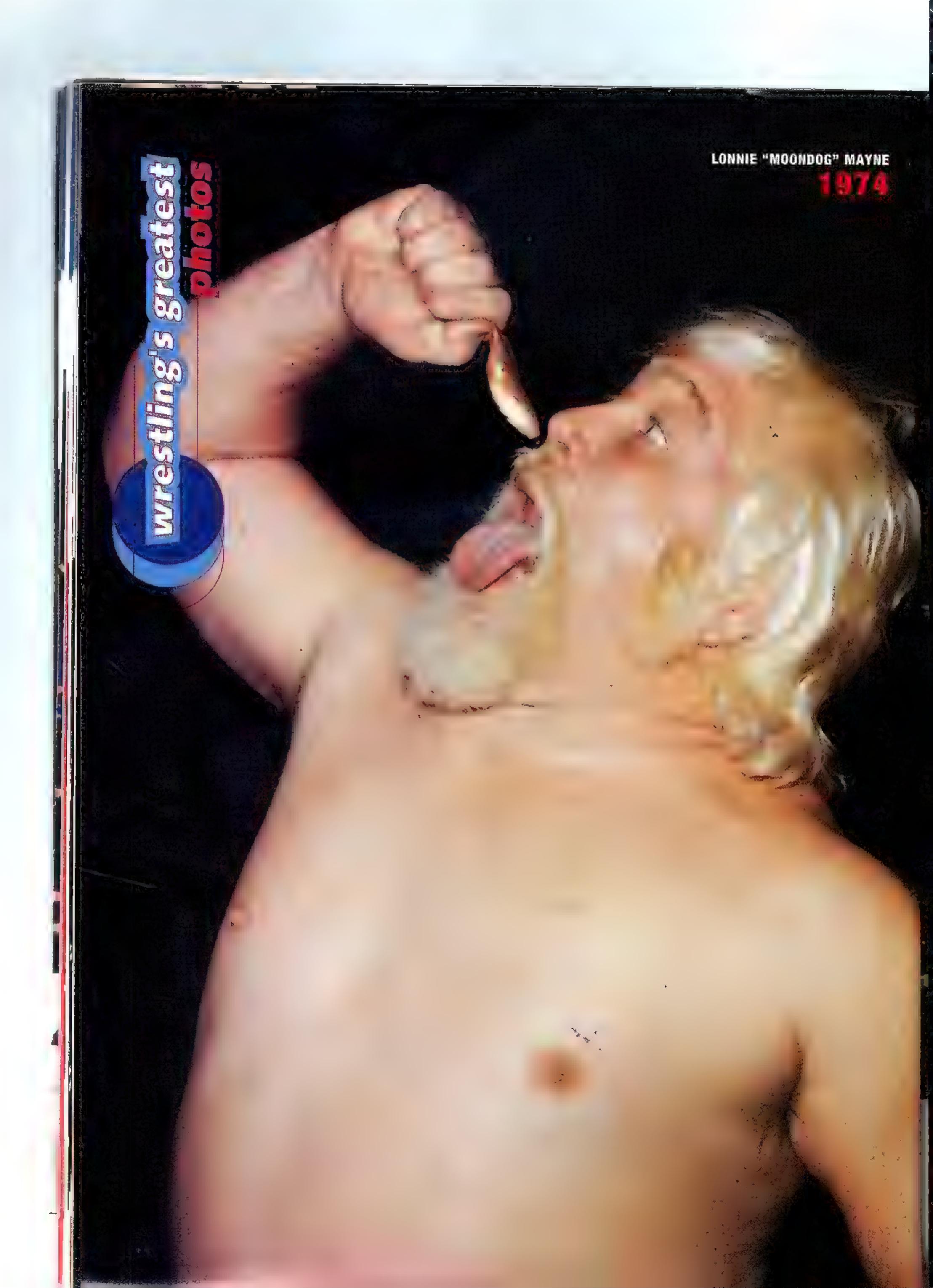
















he'd say that covers create cash. He'd be right. We place a heavy responsibility on the cover boys and girls who grace the covers of our magazines. We don't place a wrestler on a cover as a favor. As Dusty Rhodes would say, that's risky business. When a particular wrestler has made the cover he or she can take pride that it usually is an earned honor.

We have selected 20 of the top active wrestlers in the business and highlighted what our editors have determined to be their best magazine covers. Not surprisingly, Ric Flair graces the oldest cover, the January 1992 issue of our sister publication, *Pro Wrestling Illustrated*. Publisher Stu Saks handpicked that cover noting that the image—despite Flair's unconventional hairstyle—captured his elegance perfectly.

Sting lent himself to the widest array of covers, primarily because his appearance has changed greatly through the years. We even featured Sting's many faces on the cover of the April 2000 issue of Wrestling Superstars. The cover we picked for this collection, however, was from the June 1992 issue of INSIDE WRESTLING. Yes, it's beach boy Sting wearing the WCW World title belt with ST NG' in big letters as the backdrop in case you were wondering. Sting

plays the part of the letter "I." Sometimes, there were so many interesting covers that it was hard to choose just one.

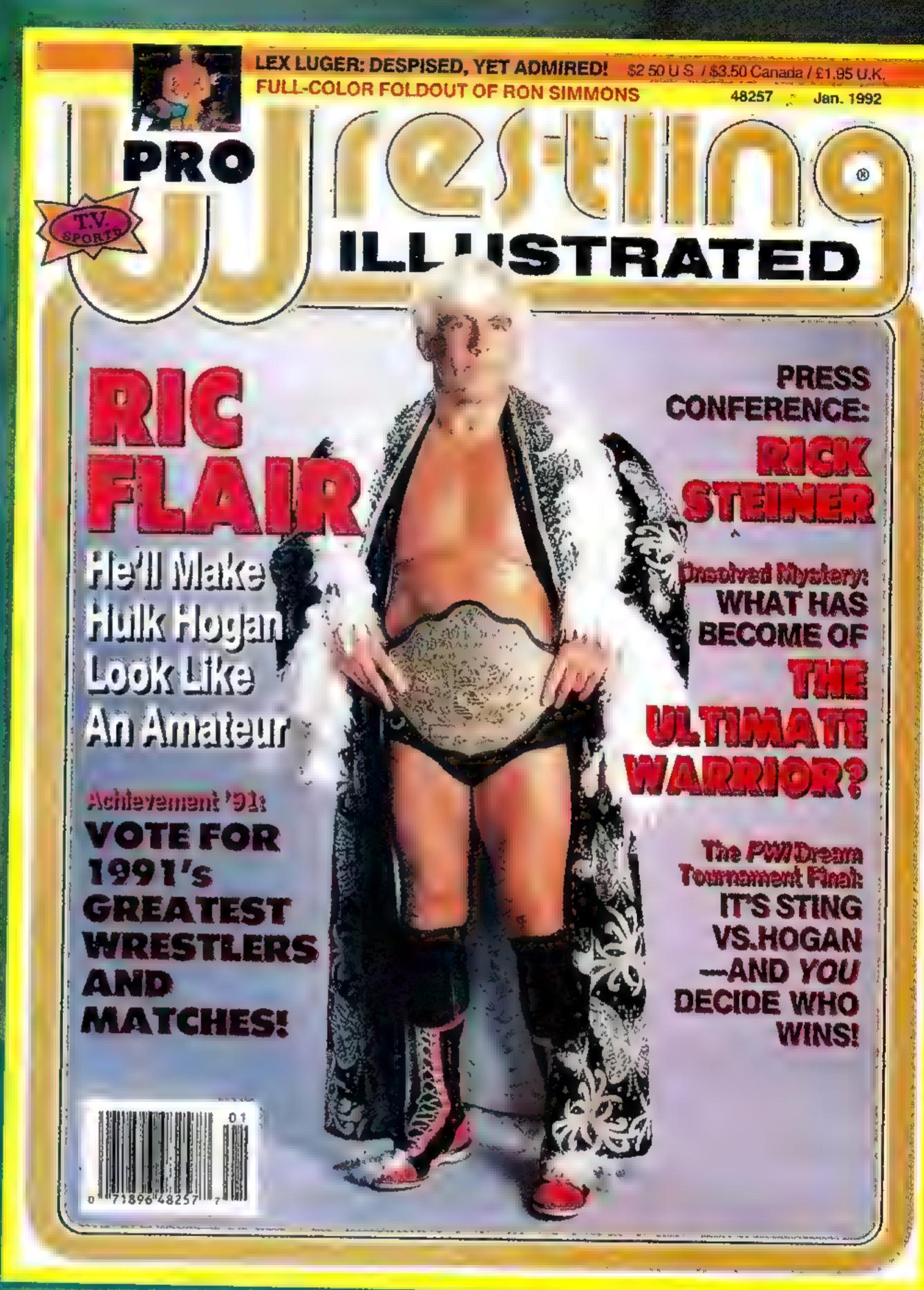
There are also the cover boys that we thought were risky choices at the time. Tommy Dreamer, as much as we respect him, probably wouldn't have made the cover of the January 2000 issue of Inside Wrestling if he hadn't been accompanied by a scantily clad Francine and a holiday candy cane. C.M. Punk, who was on the cover of the December 2006 issue of PWI, was also a risky choice. He had enjoyed a successful career on the independent circuit, but was relatively new to WWE. Considering how Punk's career has continued to advance over past six months, we think he deserved the hallowed PWI cover.

Regarding the October 2006 issue of PWI Presents: Report Cards Of The Stars, we have to admit that Vanity Fair was our inspiration for a contrived cover. Our editors thought of the concept of Samoa Joe's proud parents giving their approval for his excellent report card. Annie Leibovitz wasn't available, so we relied upon ace photographer Jan Sanders, who executed the concept flawlessly.

After you peruse the following section, we think you'll agree: These firstrate covers deserve a second look!

Unforgettable Covers Of Wresting's Greatest Stars

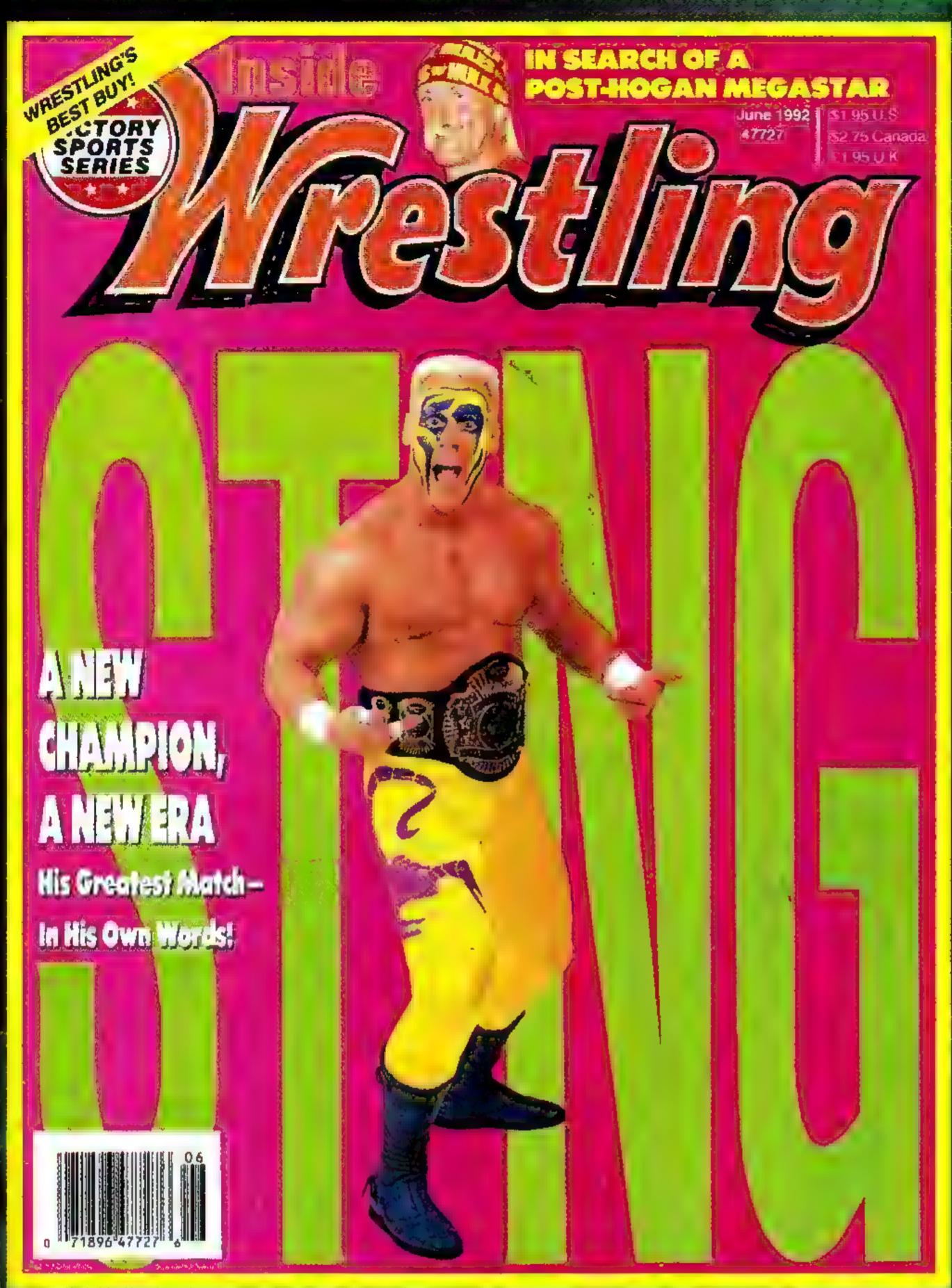




Cover Story: With the long-awaited (most feel too long-awaited) Hulk Hogan vs. Ric Flair bouts looming, some of the greats of the past weighed in with their predictions. "To tell you the truth, I've got to pick Flair-no contest," said Buddy Rogers. "I think Flair will make Hogan look like an amateur." Said Lou Thesz: "Flair's a cheal, but he's a talented cheat. Look at the men he's taken on in the past year ... everyone from highflyers to musclemen, and he's usually come out on top. That's the sign of a master wrestler. Flair victim Ron Garvin saw things differently. I have never-ever-seen a man with a greater will to win than Hulk Hogan. Whenever the money's on the line, he comes up with a victory. And this time, he's got more to prove than ever before."

Eye-Catcher: The haircut was so un-Flair, but this classy image of the 'Nature Boy' with his oversized WCW World belt and (wife of Mr. Wrestling II) Olivia Walker-designed ring robe is one of the greatest ever of a man who never liked to pose.

Mystery What Has Become Of The Ultimate Warrior? Breaking Down The WCW World Champion. Why Lex Luger is Despised And Admired. "The PWI Dream Tournament Final: It's Sting vs. Hogan—And You Decide Who Wins!" "Achievement 91: Vote For 1991's Greatest Wrestlers And Matches!" Press Conference: Rick Steiner.





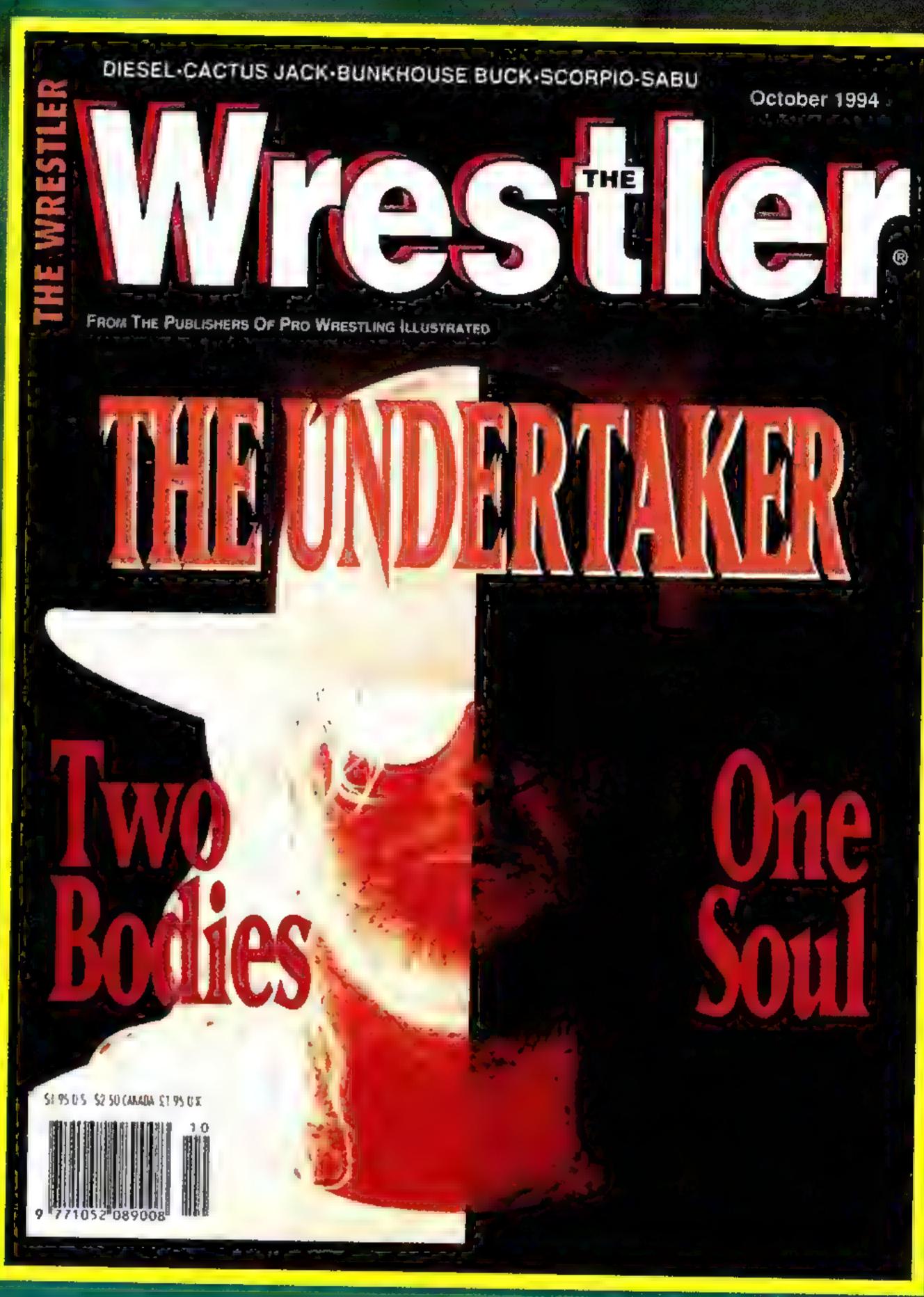
Cover Story: Sting's been wrestling for so many years that at this point it might be difficult for him to nail down which match was his greatest. Fifteen years ago, though, he knew for certain: his victory over Lex Luger on February 29, 1992, for the WCW World heavyweight title. In a story penned by Sting himself, this legend recalled the highs and lows of their struggle at SuperBrawl II in Milwaukee that ended in Sting's favor after a flying bodypress at the 13:02 mark. "I honestly didn't think anything could surpass the excitement and pride I felt after I won the WCW World title for the first time back in 1990," he wrote. "After I beat Ric Flair that hot July night in Baltimore, I truly felt like the best wrestler

in the entire world. Well, let me tell you: The sec-

Eye-Catcher: Sting himself was the missing "I" on this uniquely designed cover.

Race Forms His Own Dangerous Alliance"... "IRS & Million-Dollar Man: Beneath The Flash & Clash—The Best Team In Wrestling?"... "The WWF's First Post-Hogan Megastar: Who Will It Be?"... "Champion Tony Atlas' Warning To IWCCW: 'Stop Sending Me Your WWF Castoffs!" Hotseat: Marcus Alexander Bagwell.

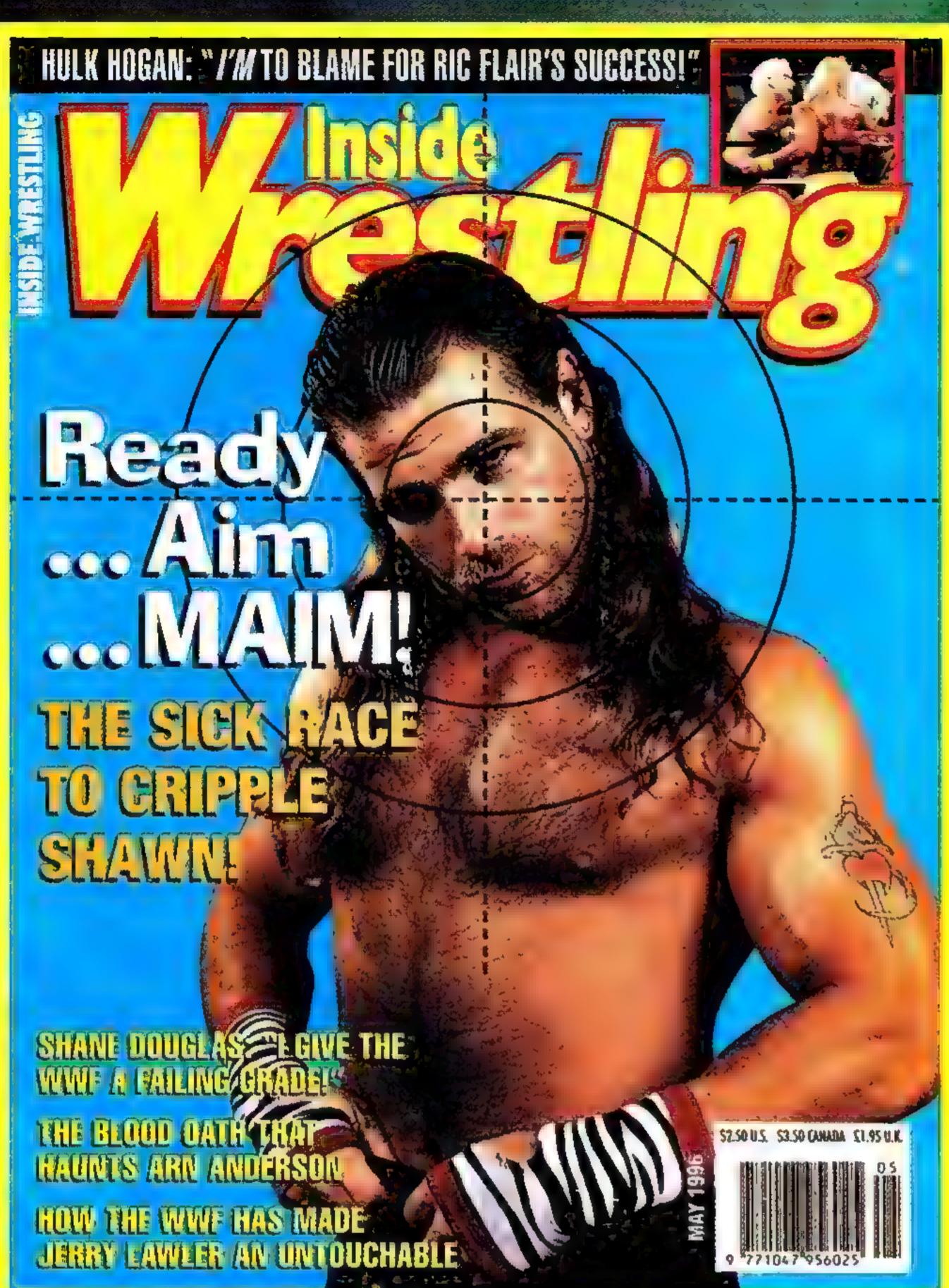




Cover Story: An extensive investigation revealed that there were two Undertakers, one who was loved by the lans for battling bad men like Yokozuna, and another—an impostor Undertaker—who was intent on proving to the real Undertaker that he should resume his evil ways. "Million-Dollar Man" Ted DiBlase was the man behind the charade, and our story described his new charge as "phony as DiBlase's two-dollar bills." This dilemma could be ironed out only if the two wrestlers met in the ring. Our story concluded this way: "Who knows what happens when two bodies battle for one soul? It could be heaven on earth. It could be hell."

Eye-Catcher: The two-color split positive/negative image is a bit freaky looking, but no more so than The Undertaker himself.

Also in The Issue: "WWF Promoters, Wake Up! Diesel Must Wrestle Michaels At SummerSlam!" ... "Terry Funk vs. The Sheik. That Crazy Old Man Set Me On Fire!" ... "Cactus' Maniacal Message: Take Another Piece Of My Body—I'll Have Less To Lose!" ... "Hijacked! How Paul E. Grounded The Scorpio-Sabu Air Show!" Q & A: Bunkhouse Buck.

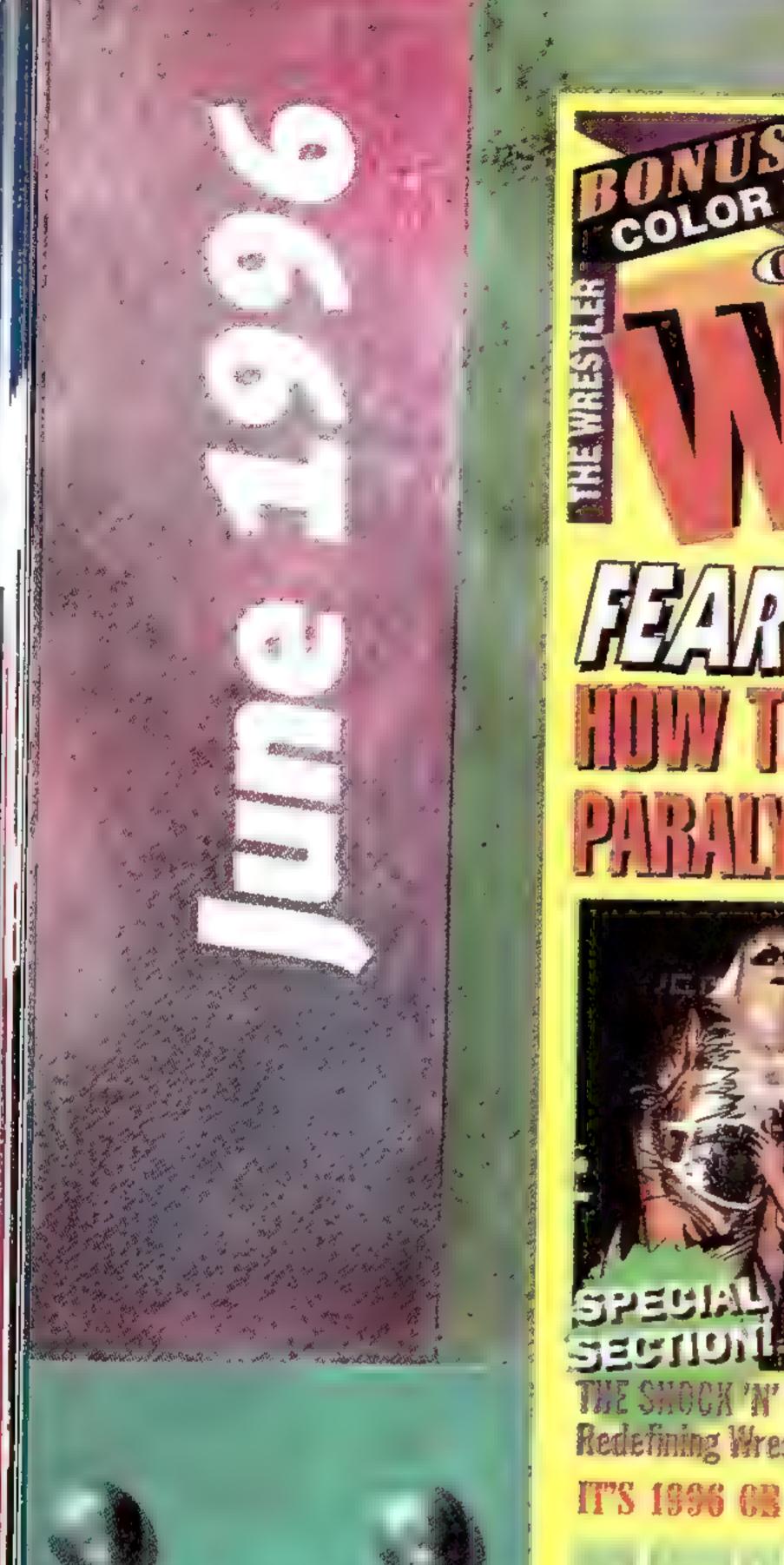


Cover Story: Shawn Michaels had still not fully recovered from the physical and mental trauma of being attacked while sitting in his car outside a Syracuse, New York, nightclub five months earlier. But now the whispers were becoming quite audible and it was becoming apparent that the "Heartbreak Kid" was being set up for even worse attacks right from within the WWF. There was a very distinct anti-Michaels campaign brewing among those envious of his success, resentful of his standing within the organization, and even jealous of his good looks. When asked if they might be taking things too far, one unnamed wrestler shouted back, "Too far? That's a bunch of crap. Guys like me, we don't get squat for attention, and we're on the road 300 days a year sweatin' and gettin knocked around

the ring. To beat Michaels into retirement - well, that's all we could ask for!"

Eye-Catcher: There were objections from some of our editors about the implication of putting a riflescope's crosshair in front of Michaels face, but it did help emphasize the point, and not even HBK himself raised a stink.

Also In The Issue: "Wrestling's Next Great Tag Team? The Violent World Of The Eliminators" ... "Hulk Hogan: 'I'm To Blame For Ric Flair's Success A World Title Or Else: The Blood Oath That Haunts Arn Anderson Revealed! How The WWF Has Made Jerry Lawler An Untouchable Hotseat: Shane Douglas:



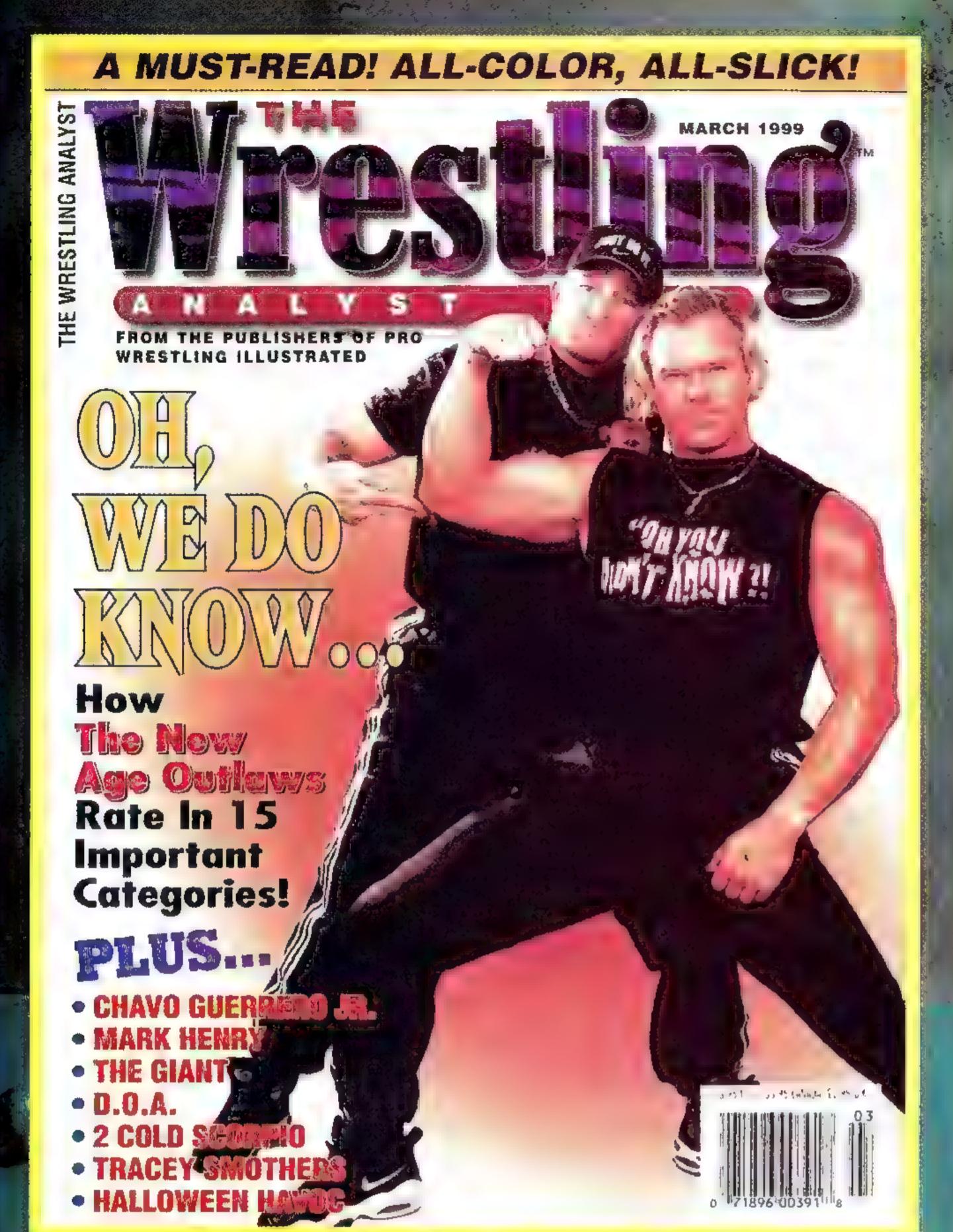


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semal care of the hobody else can Sign by the guy

> The Giant's head the brainchild of

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Cover Story: Today's Voodoo Kin Malia has WWE on their minds a lot, some say because that's where they'd prefer to ply their trade. But back in 1999, they were the star tag team in the WWF, enjoying their third of five tag team title runs. Back when The Wrestling Analyst was its own magazine and not just a department in The Wrestler Inside Wrestling Special, we gave Billy Gunn (Kip James) and Jesse James (B.G. James) scores of 9.5 to stamina, power, speed, ability to absorb punishment, and a perfect 10.0 for quality of opposition. Indeed, it was a glorious time for tag team wrestling.

in the WWF, with the champs having successfully turned back the challenges of Steve Austin and The Undertaker, Kane and Mankind, D-Lo Brown and Mark Henry and LOD 2000

Eye Catcher: Our answer to Billy Gunn's "Oh, You Didn't Know?!" was right there ... for only \$3.95.

Also In The Issue. Our analyses of Chavo Guerrero Jr., Mark Henry, The Giant, D.O.A, 2 Cold Scorpic, Tracy Smothers, and the Halloween Havoc pay-per-view.

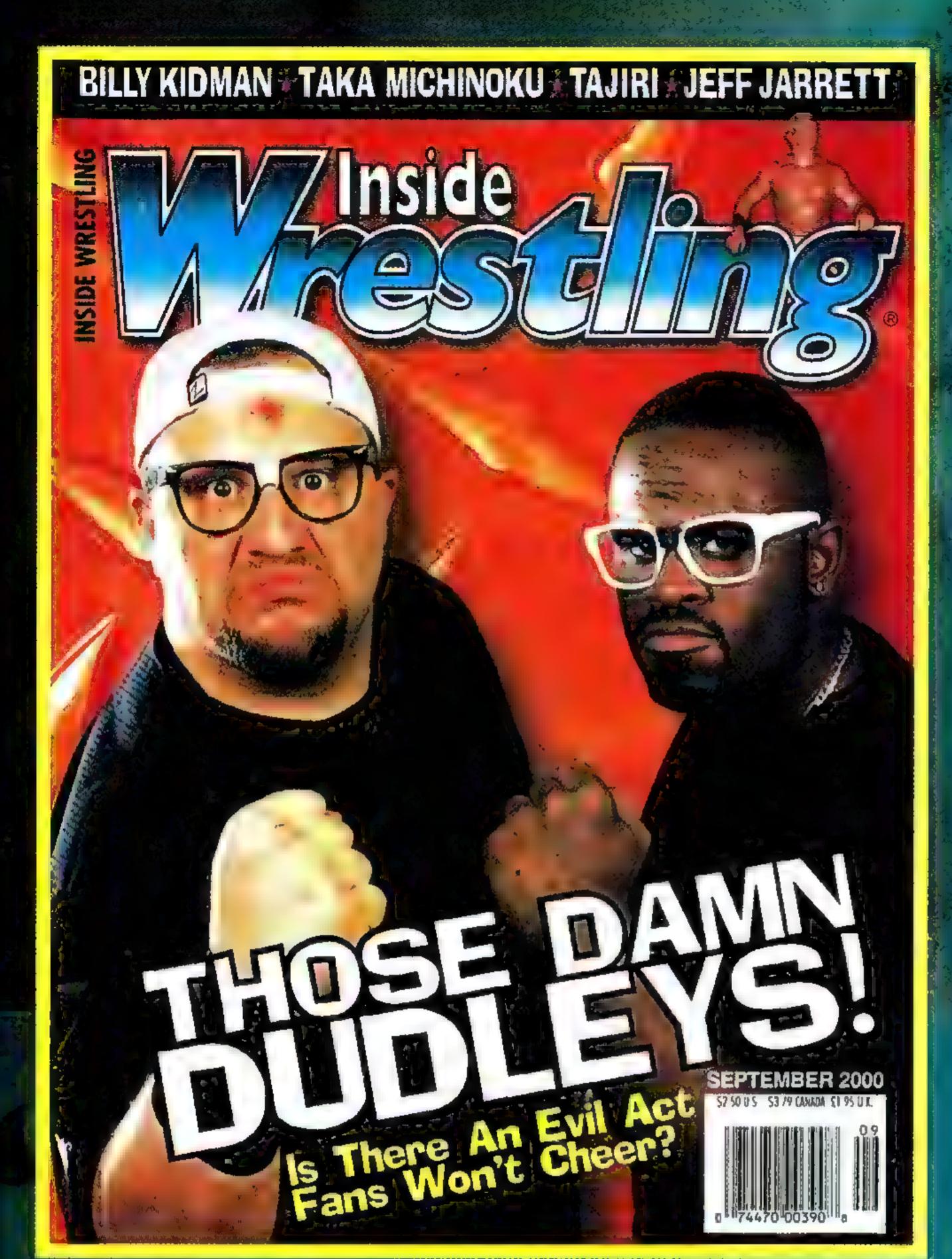




Cover Story: What can you give the wrestler Eye-Catcher: Francine in ner nightie, of course, who seems to have everything? Well, we came up with a list that included, of course, our cover subjects, Santa Dreamer, and his little elf, Francine. For Tommy: "We wish a year completely free of injury. Let's see what 'The Innovator Of Violence' can accomplish when he's at 100 percent." For Francine: "We wish a gift certificate for Victoria's Secret. Or maybe that's more of our Christmas wish for us." After the issue went on sale, Francine reported that she got that gift several times over from her fans. Sadiy, Dreamer's gift is not one you can buy in a store.

but what you didn't know is that then-Managing Editor Brandi Mankiewicz worked behind the scenes to make sure what appeared in the photo was only what was intended to appear in the photo. We never liked Brandi very much.

Also In The Issue: "The Show Must Go On! Why Paul Wight Needs The Undertaker" ... "'The Dastardly One' & 'The Angry Chicken Plucker': The Strange Bond Between Danny Doring & Amish Roadkill "Goldberg: Happy, Healthy, & Hungry! Cigar Aficionados? Wrestling History Is Full Of Them!" ... Hotseat: Billy Gunn.



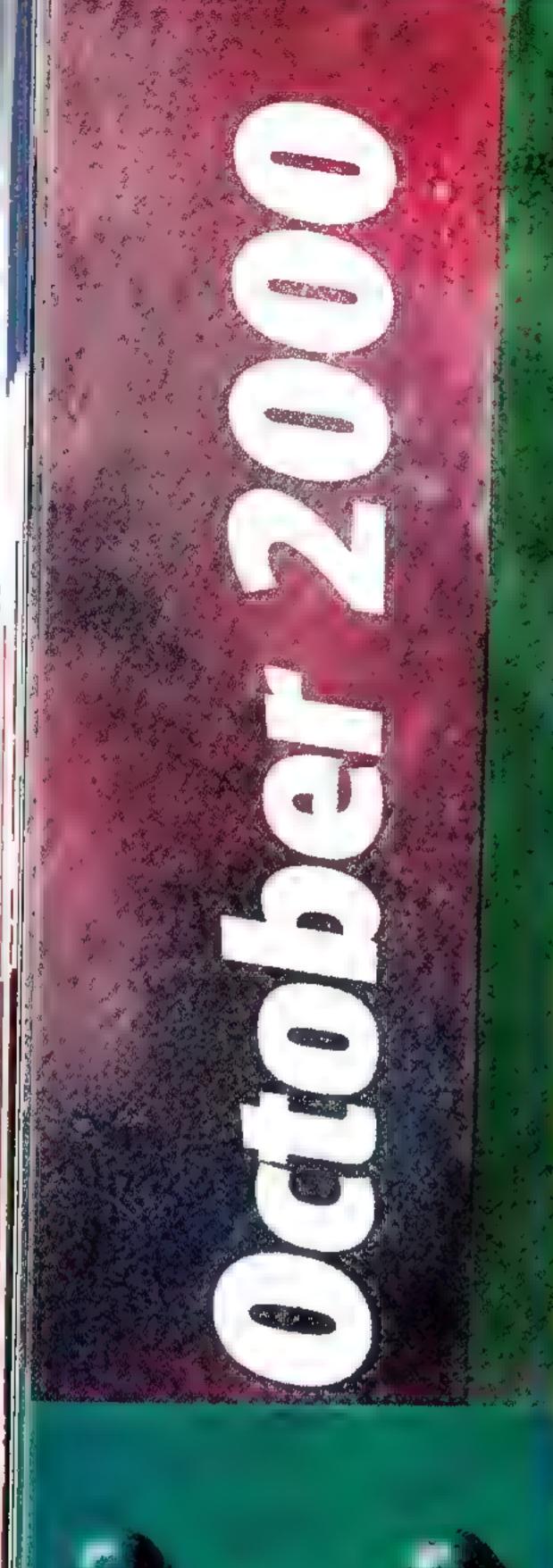


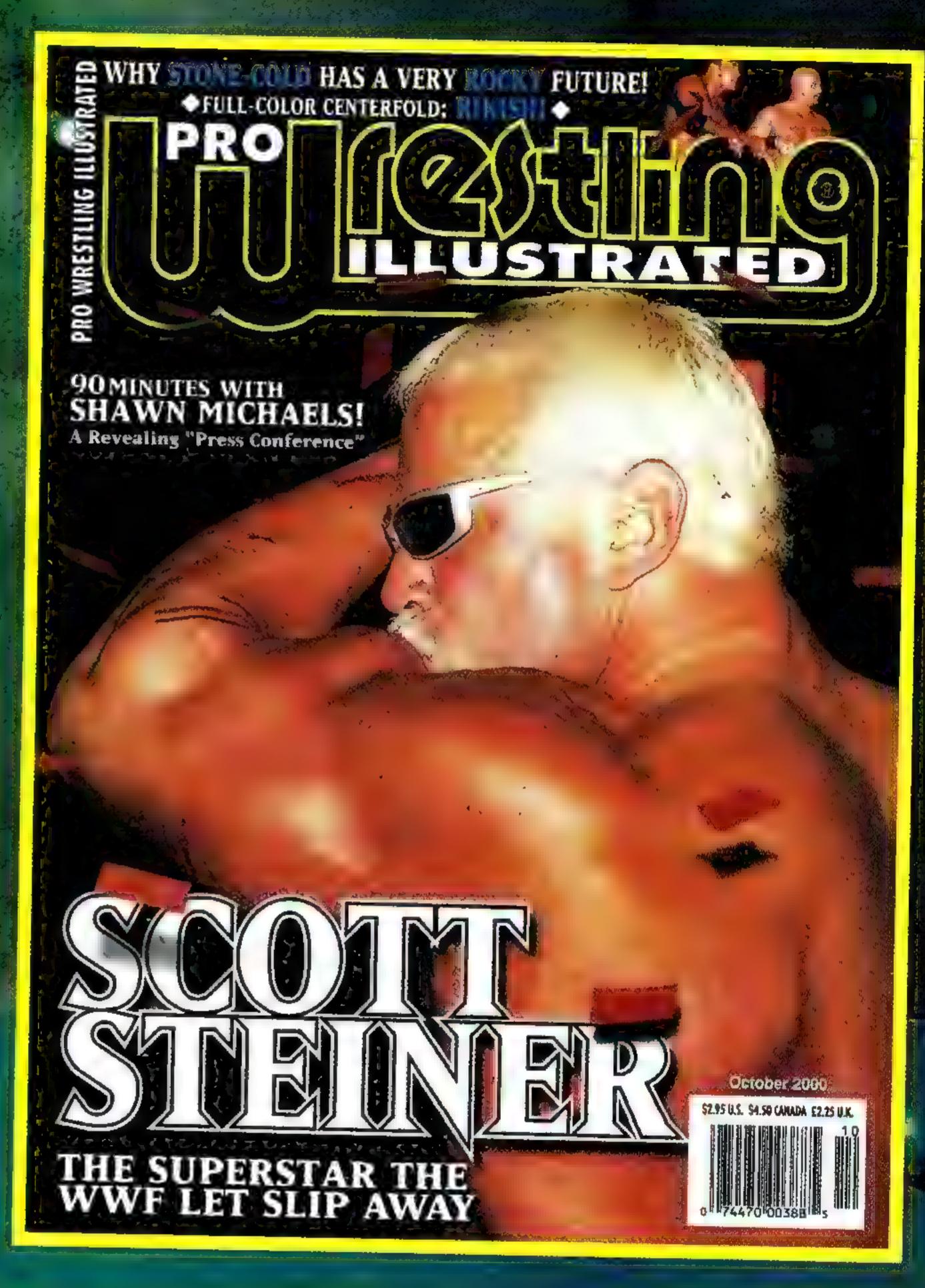
Cover Story: Back in 2000, it seemed as if The Dudley Boyz could do no wrong. Buh Buh Ray and D-Von had sent fan favorites such as Edge, Christian, and The Hardy Boyz through tables. More disgusting, though, was the fact that a number of women had been forced to dine at the splintered table buffet. Buh Buh Ray had used a toprope power bomb to put Terri Runnels through a table, and, if not for Test, would have done the same to Trish Stratus. The most heinous act, however, was Buh Buh Ray putting 76-year-old Mae Young through a table. And the fans continued chanting, "Ta-bles, ta-bles!" In fact, according to the story, "Some of them would have sacrificed their own grandmothers if it meant a chance to see another old lady crash through a table." But per-

haps Jim Ross' exclamation said it all: "Those damn Dudleys!"

Eye-Catcher: The Dudleys graced the cover of a London Publishing magazine for the first time, and their bespectacled mugs—against the orange backdrop—made for a fearsome image. And Team 3D thinks LAX plays too rough?

Also In The Issue: "How Taka Michinoku Nearly Bought The WWF Title!" ... "Why The New Blood Is Boiling Mad At Jeff Jarrett" ... "Kamikaze Mission: Is Tajiri's Hardcore Obsession A Career Killer?" Hotseat: Billy Kidman ... "Inside Wrestling Exclusive: Why Shawn Michaels Had To Wrestle One Last Time!"



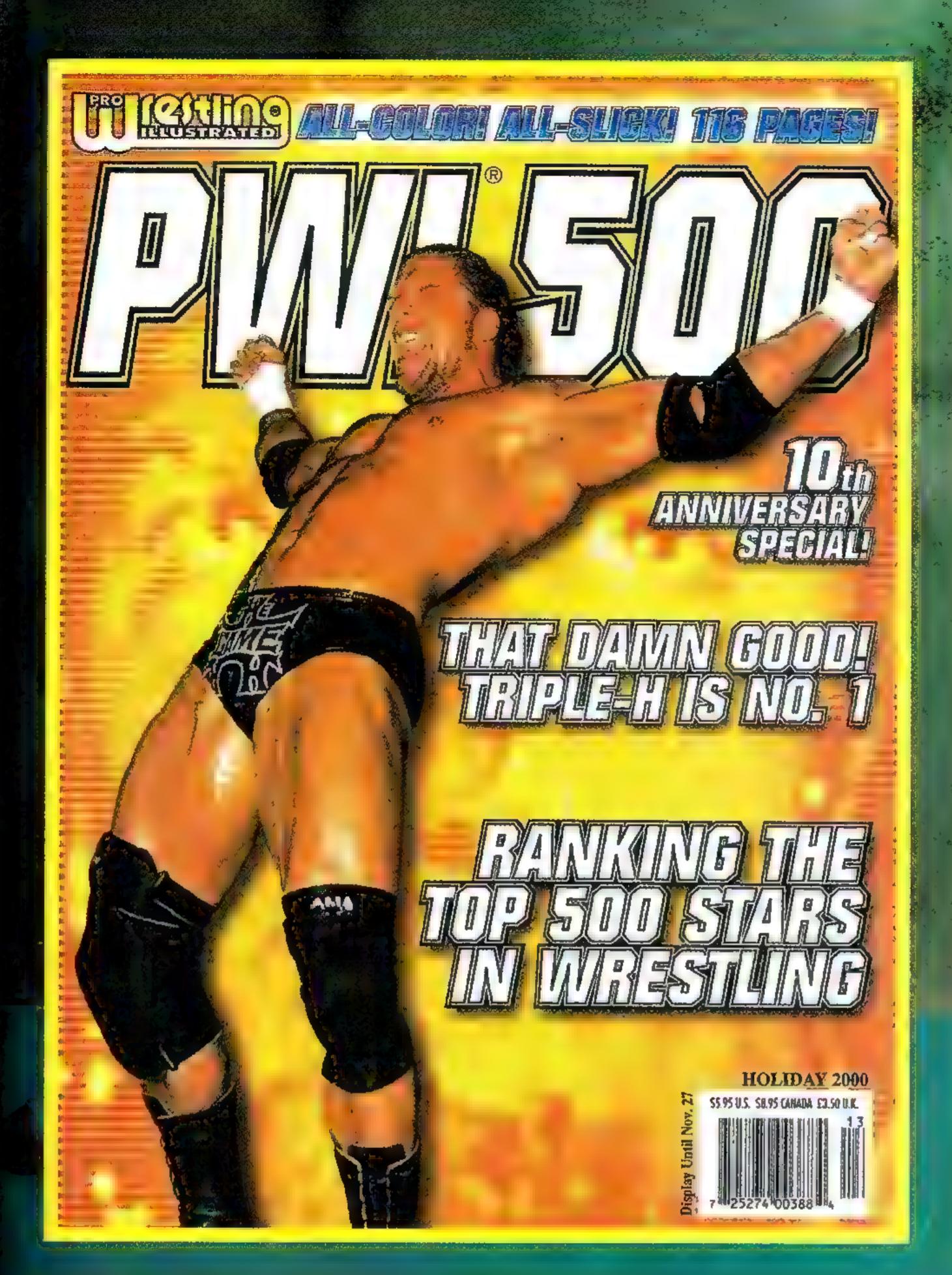


Cover Story: In the dying days of WCW, only one man seemed as cool, charismatic, and cutting edge as the WWF stars who were helping Vince McMahon win the "Monday Night War." That man was Scott Steiner. Although Steiner had wrestled in the WWF, even holding the World tag team title with his brother, Rick, McMahon somehow didn't notice his tremendous potential. Our story made the case that Steiner could have been as important to the WWF as Steve Austin. The Rock, and Triple-H. "He's not young, but he comes across as youthful," said WCW expert Donald Wayne. "You look at him and you don't think Hulk Hogan or Ric Flair. He seems to have tapped into what gets today's

wrestling audience going." After this issue, "Big Poppa Pump" went on to win the WCW World title and reign as champion during the last six months of the company's existence.

Eye-Catcher: Steiner's bulging bicep was the focal point of this cover, and "Big Poppa Pump's" fascination with his own physique was apparent here.

Also In The Issue: "Rhino Takes A Slap At RVD: 'If I'm TV Champ For Two Years, I'll Quit!" 90-Minute Press Conference: Shawn Michaels "Does 'Stone-Cold' Know His Role? No Matter How You Cut It, He Has A Rocky Future!"



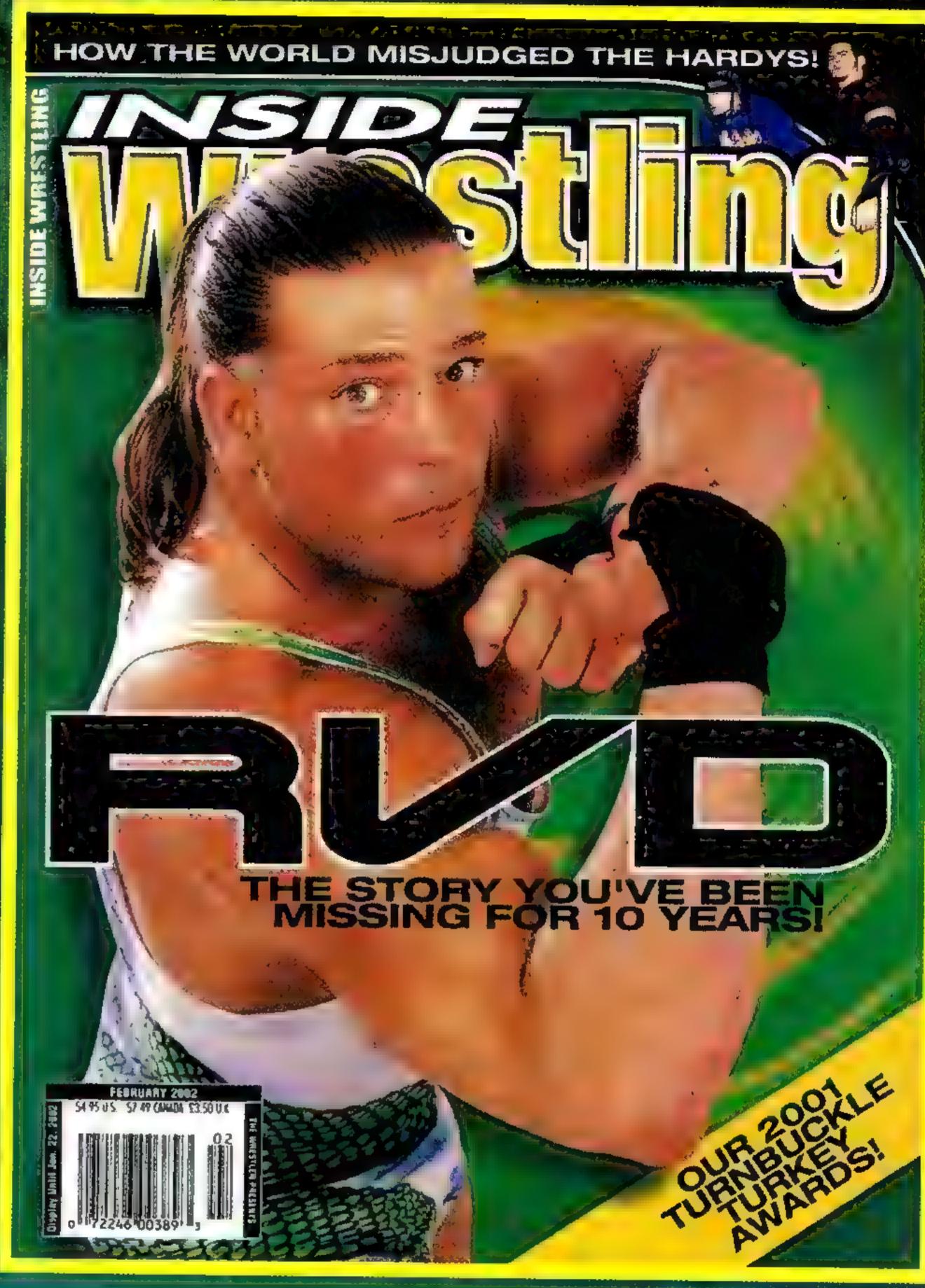
Cover Story: In 2000, our editors confirmed Triple-H had won his hard-fought struggle for main-event acceptance when he was ranked number one in the "PWI 500." He was selected because of five key accomplishments over the preceding 12 months. his capture of a fourth WWF title from The Rock in an "Ironman" match; his win over Mick Foley in a "Hell In A Cell" match, forcing Foley to retire; his win over Foley, Davey Boy Smith, The Big Show, The Rock, and Kane in a six-way match, his retention of the WWF title in a four-way match also involving Foley, Rock, and Big Show at WrestleMania XVI; and his victory over Chris Jericho in a last-manstanding match. When reached for comment,

Triple-H said, "The 'PWI 500' has always been a big deal in the business. So to be chosen as the number-one guy is a really big thing to me. It's an honor I take seriously."

Eye-Catcher: On one of those rare covers that comes across as primal and futuristic at the same time, Triple-H strikes a familiar pose against the digitized backdrop of his own face.

Also In The Issue: Rounding out the top 10 for the 2000 "PWI 500" were The Rock, Chris Benoit, Kenta Kobashi, Jeff Jarrett, Justin Credible, Mike Awesome, Jushin Liger, Chris Jericho, and Kensuke Sasaki.



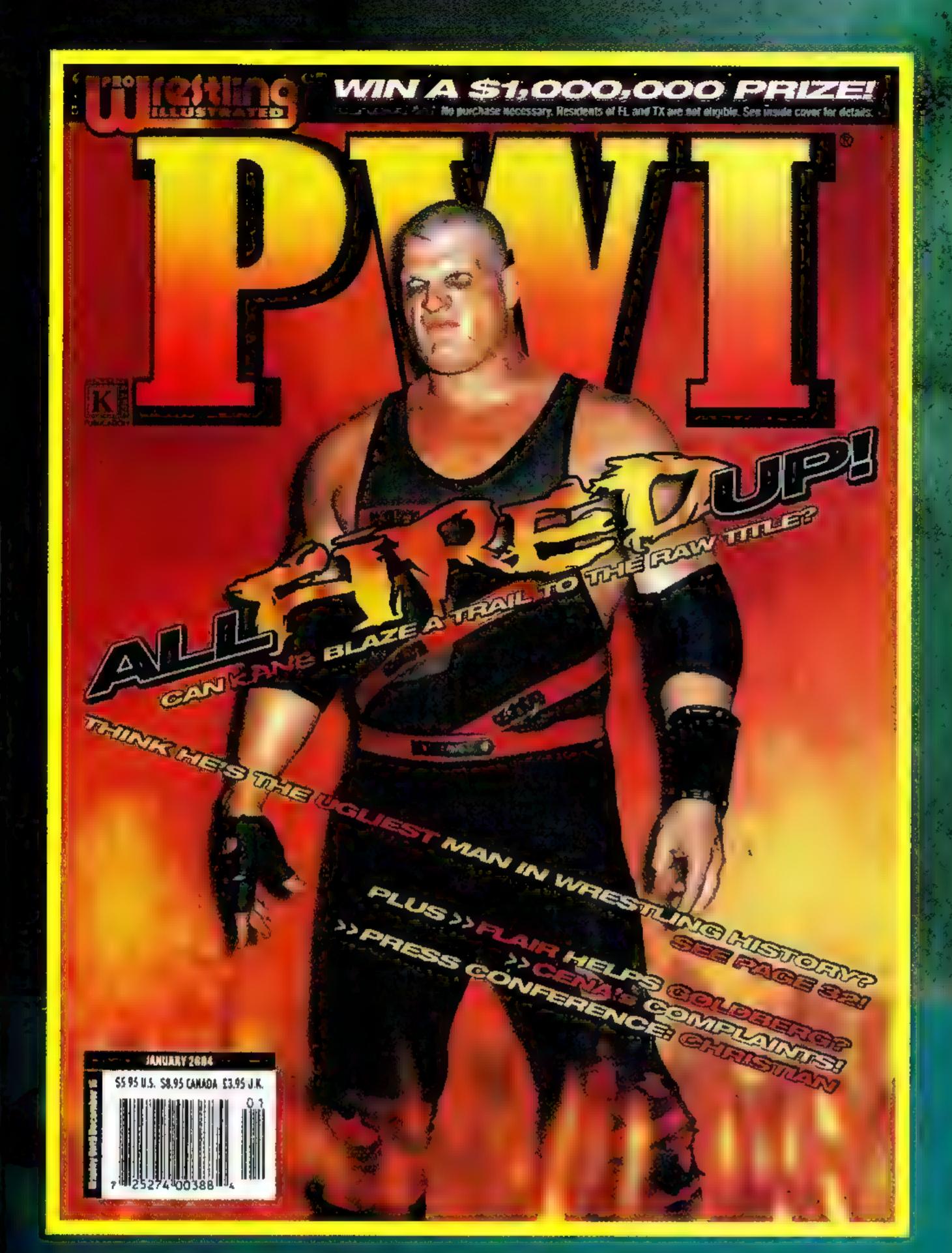


Cover Story: Of course, any diehard wrestling fan was aware of Rob Van Dam's contributions to the sport before 2002. Most recently, Van Dam had held the ECW TV title for an astounding two years and seemed on the verge of winning the ECW World championship just before the company went out of business. He had ranked number two in the 1999 "PWI 500," just behind Steve Austin. If not for injuries, he would have likely cracked the top 10 in 2000 and '01. But, when Van Dam appeared on Raw as a member of the WCW/ECW Alliance, he was unknown to a sizable percentage of the WWF's mass audience. This feature sought to fill in the gaps-tracing his career from the independent circuit to WCW to ECW-for those WWF viewers who hadn't

been acquainted with Van Dam during the previ-

Eye-Catcher: Art Director Greg Stevens did not have a downward spiral in mind when he designed London Publishing's first cover featuring Van Dam; the whirling green effect was supposed to signify RVD's metaphysical appeal.

Also In The Issue: "Presenting The 2001 Turnbuckle Turkey Awards!" ... "Breakup? What Breakup? How The World Misjudged The Hardys" ... "The Bob Orton Sr. vs. Bob Orton Jr. Debate: How Randy Orton Will Become A Star" ... Hotseat: Shawn Stasiak ... "What If ... Turner Broadcasting Never Merged With Time Warner?"





Cover Story: We probed deeply into Kane's psyche, and even contacted our favorite psychologist, Dr. Sidney M. Basil, who offered his theories regarding Kane's mean streak and his failure to win the Raw World title. Dr. Basil suggested that Kane needed personal tragedy (such as his terrible childhood and, most recently, the betrayal of his girlfriend, Tori) to spark his competitive nature. His penchant for self-destruction actually fed his inring intensity, causing a vicious cycle. But, despite his lust for domination, he seemed to be avoiding a confrontation with Raw World champion Triple-H. According to Dr. Basil, that was because of Kane's fear of failure. Citing the "Big Red Machine's" 24-hour title reign in 1998, Dr. Basil said, "He may be

alraid of winning the championship a second time because he doesn't want to suffer the failure of losing it again."

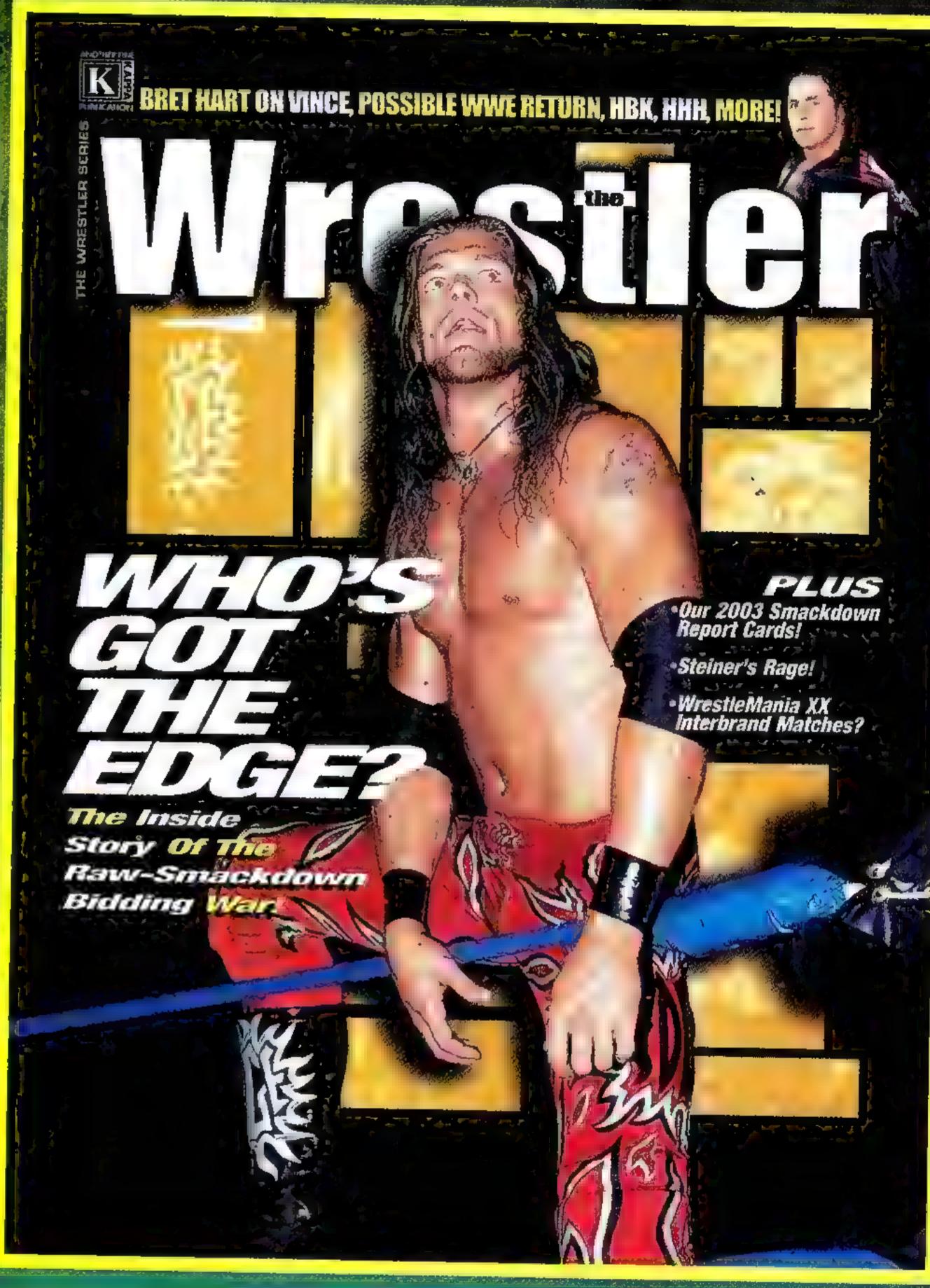
Eye-Catcher. Kane seemed to be emerging from the depths of hell on this hot, orange cover. Under that scowl lurked an evil man.

Also In The Issue: Press Conference: Christian ...

Ugliest Men In Wrestling History Photo Gallery" ...

"John Cena: 'I Should Be In Main Events, Not In Handicap Matches!" Samoa Joe's Warning: Don't Ever Speak Dishonorably About Ring Of Honor!" "Exclusive Analysis: How Wrestling Flair Changed Goldberg Forever."



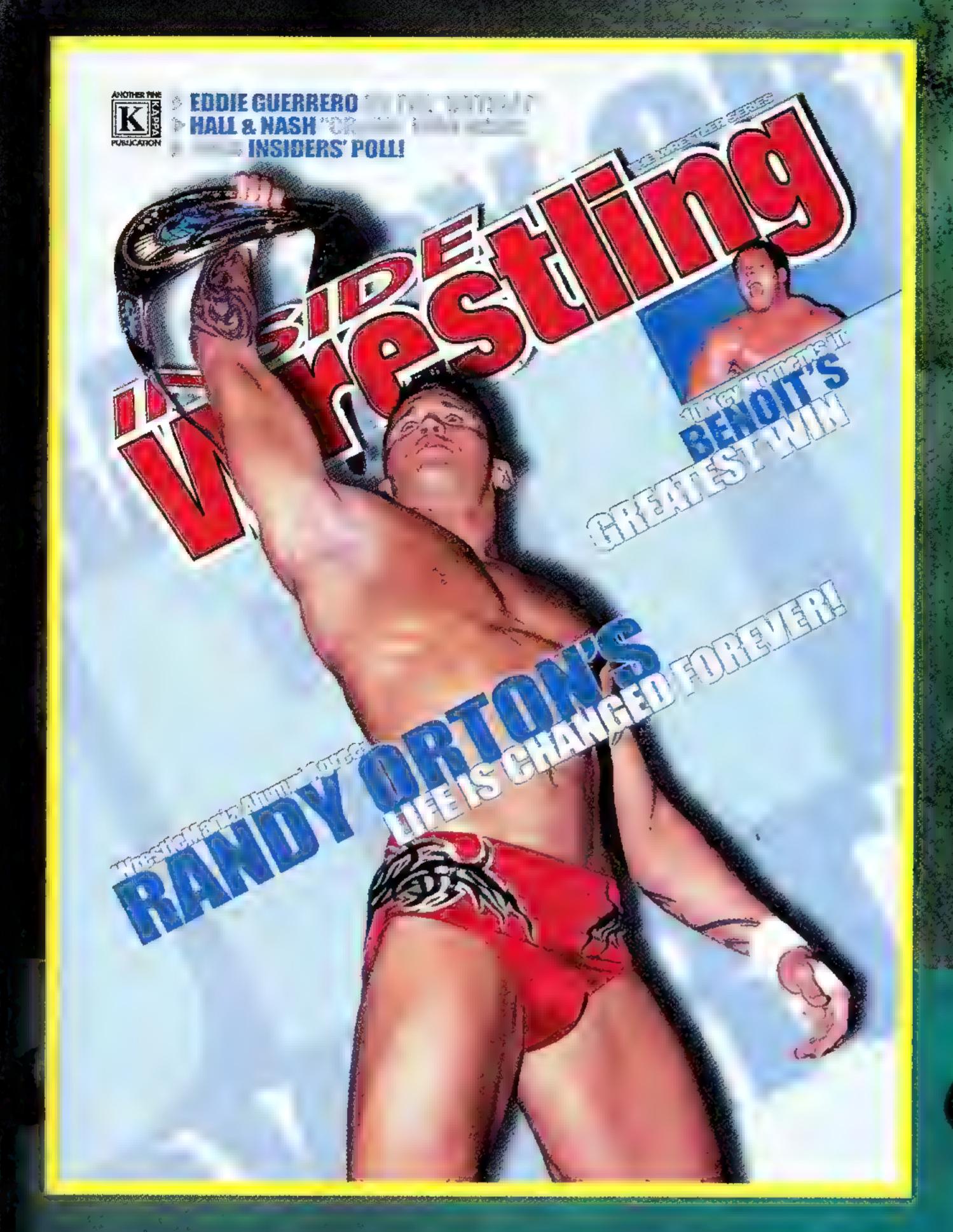


Cover Story Our editors had Edge tagged as a hot properly quite a while ago, and that's why he was made the cover boy of this particular issue. Edge had been a top ian favorite on Smackdown, and had even held that brand's World tag team title with Hulk Hogan, but a neck injury—and consequent vertebrae-fusion surgery—caused him to miss nearly a year of action. On the eve of his return, the conventional wisdom was that WWE management had decided that it was time for a main-event push. But which brand would get the benefit of that push, Raw or Smackdown? Initially, Edge wanted to return to Smackdown, where he had gained momentum just before his injury, but, in an interview, he revealed that join-

ing Raw was a distinct possibility. As it turned out Edge did join Raw and the rest is "Rated R" history.

Eye-Catcher: When selecting a cover photo, it's important to keep the facial expression of the subject in mind. That was especially true in this case, as Edge seems to be thinking, Hmmmm, Raw or Smackdown?

Also In The Issue: 90-Minute Q&A: Bret Hart
"Our 2003 Report Cards For The Smackdown
Stars" ... "A Japanese Woman's Dream: I Wanted
To Wrestle In The U.S.A., So Sue Me!" ... "When
Scott Steiner Gets Bored With Stacy, Watch Out!"



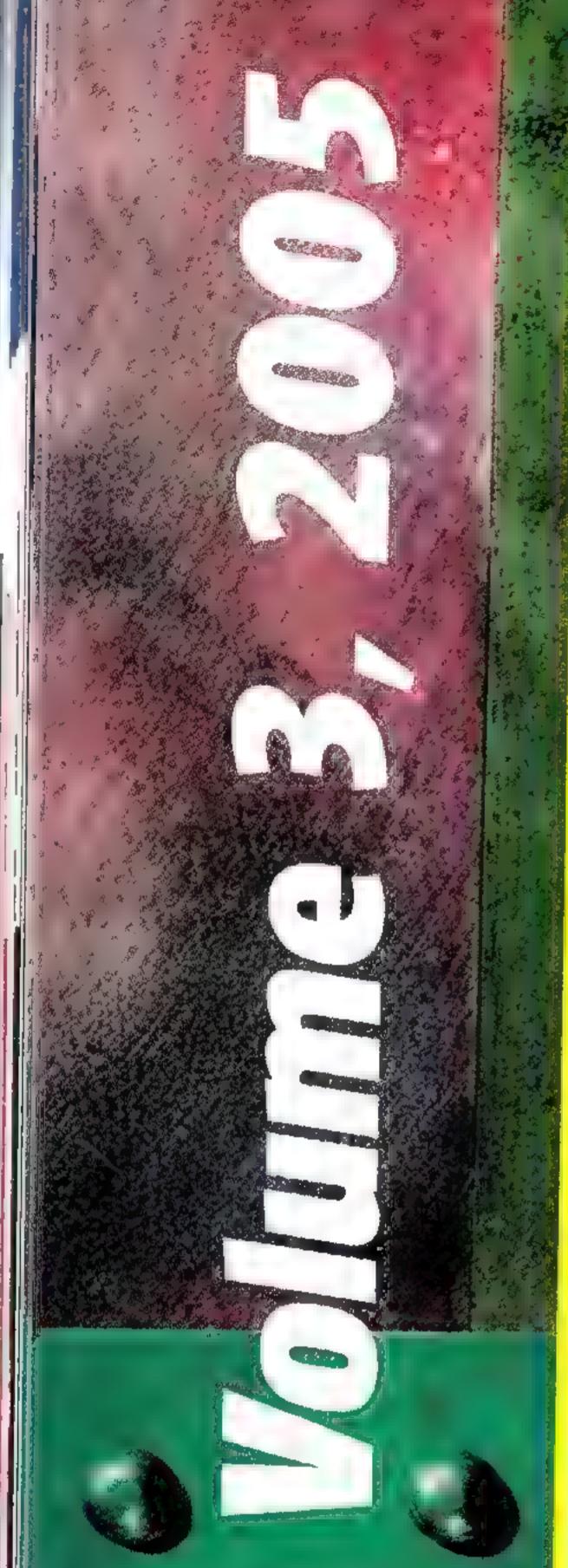


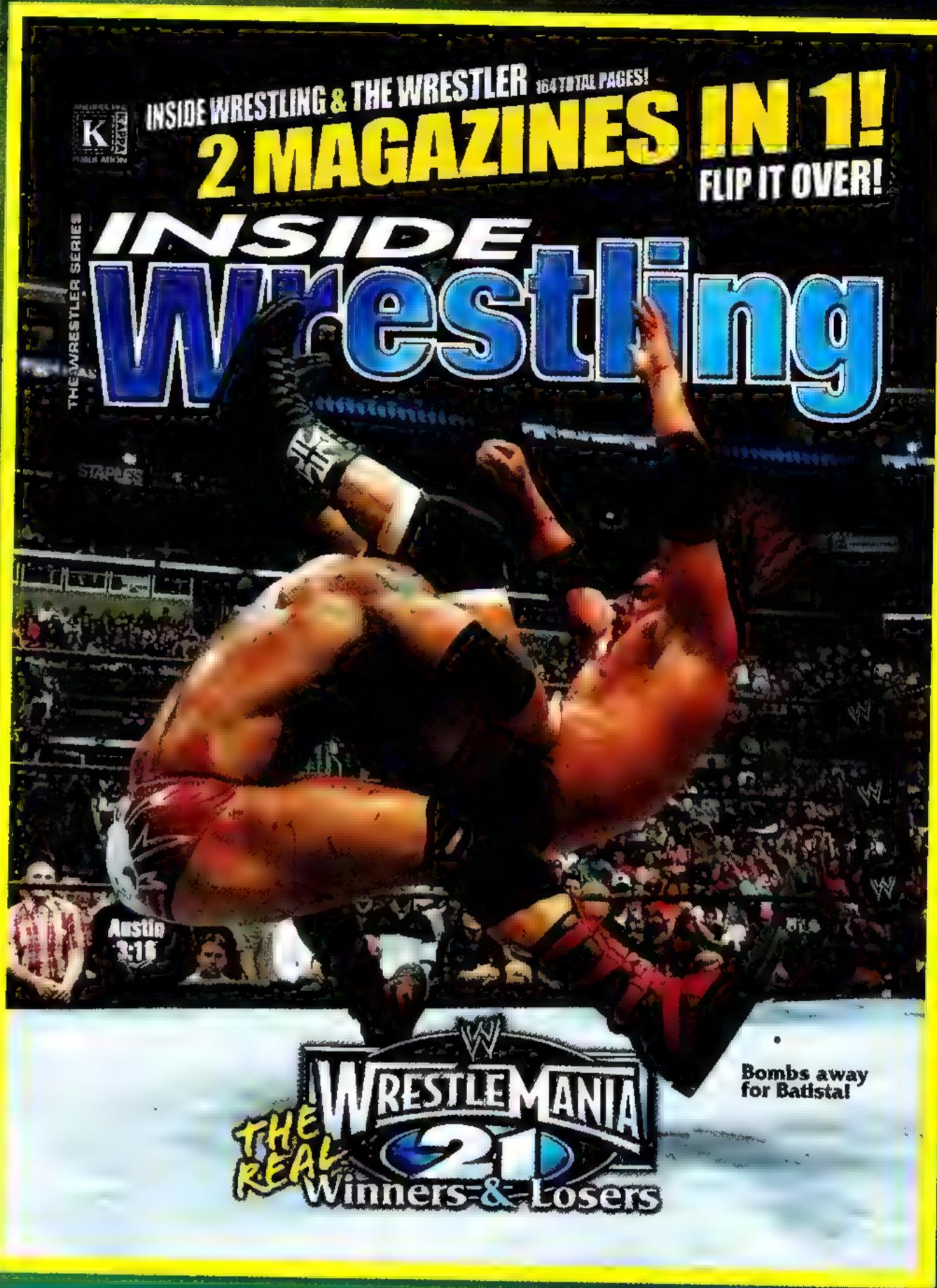
Mania "rookies" at WrestleMania XX the pay-perview definitely lived up to its theme. "Where It All Begins Again." A number of WrestleMania alumniagreed the event was a turning point for intercontinental champion Randy Orton in particular. Teaming with Evolution partner Batista against Mick Foley and The Rock, Orton actually pinned Foley clean to win the match for his team. Such a decisive performance almost guaranteed that 2004 would be a breakout year for Orton. In the story, Orton said he remembered how his father's mistake cost Roddy Piper and Paul Orndorff a victory at WrestleMania I and, for him that underscored the importance of winning at the event. Greg Valentine.

Bobby Heenan, and Tito Santana offered opinions in the story although none of them were notably successful at WrestleMania themselves.

Eye Catcher. The fact that Orton's image was the primary focus of the cover, with new Raw World champion Chris Benoit relegated to a secondary shot, had to be an ego boost for the third-generation star.

Wrestling's Hottest Questions Answered!"
Hotseat: Eddie Guerrero "Hall & Nash Crash
UPW's Birthday Bash!" 10 Crucial Moments In
Chris Benoit's Greatest Victory."





Cover Story: As part of an annual feature following WrestleMania, Inside Wrestling reported the "real" winners and losers of wrestling's biggest yearly event. Along with noted real losers Motorhead, the entire Raw roster was named as additional losers of the showdown between Batista and Triple-H. The reasoning? "Dealing with an unhappy Triple-H is never fun." On the other hand, Batista's win—which was made possible by the Batista bomb featured on the cover—not only made Batista the Raw World champion, but it also qualified WWE's next generation as real winners, signifying rising stars such as Batista, John Cena, and Randy Orton.

Eye-Catcher: Our man at ringside, veteran photographer George Napolitano, skillfully caught the most important move of the card, but he also lucked out a bit by snapping at the very instant WWE's remote-controlled arena strobes went off for their official photographer, adding to the overall ambience.

Also in The Issue: "Hulk Hogan Steals Wrestle-Mania!" "10 Unforgettable WrestleMania Moments" "Jim Cornette & Bobby Heenan: How Their War Of Words Turned Into Managerial Mayhem" "For Pete's Sake! TNA's Williams Captures The Super 8 Trophy" 60-Minute Q&A: Terry Funk "Shawn Michaels: There's Never A Loser In A Match Of The Year."





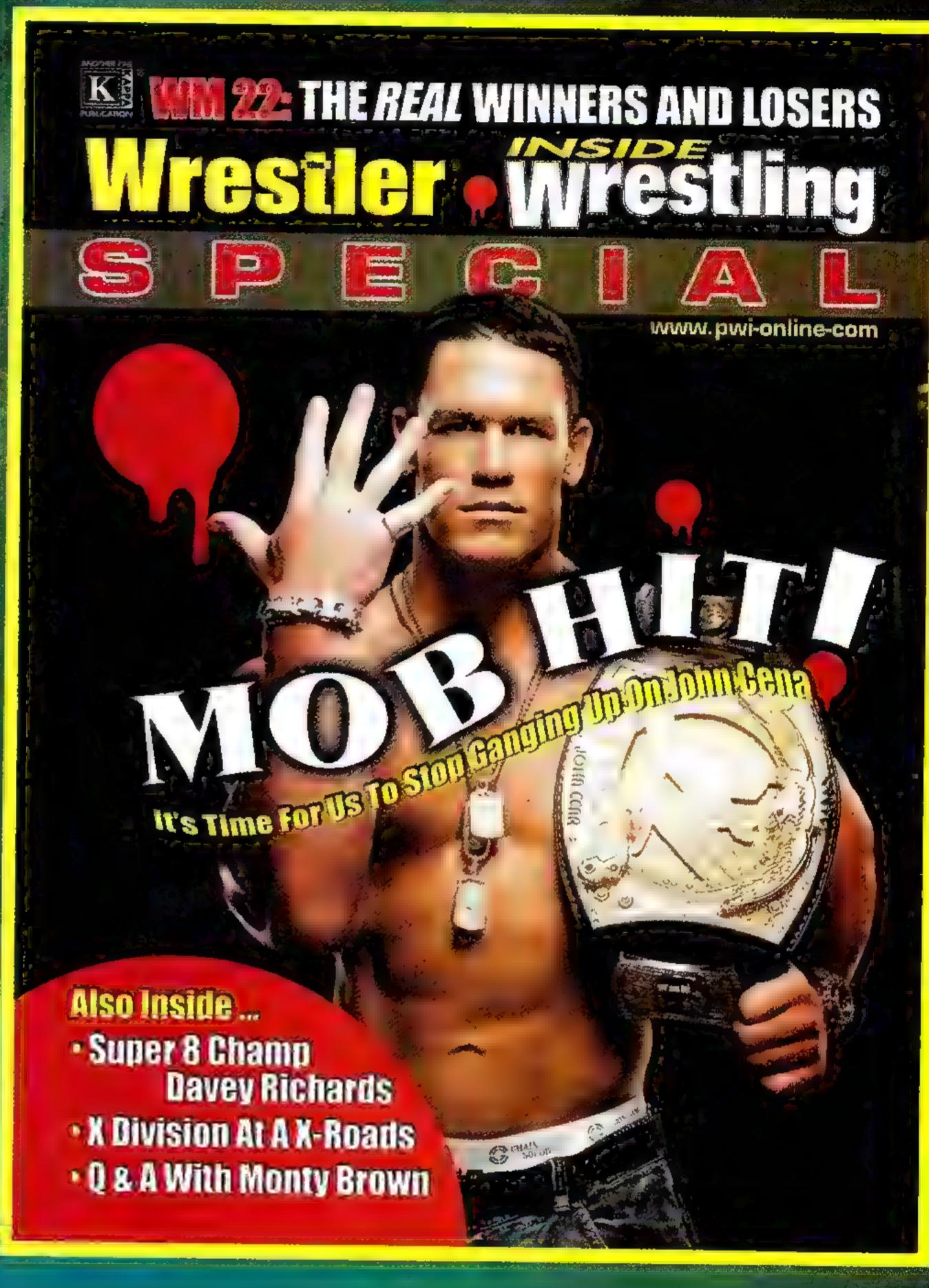
Cover Story: The perennial question of the importance of size in wrestling may never diminish, but, in 2006, Rey Mysterio Jr. convinced many skeptics that a good little guy could indeed outmaneuver a man who towers over him. As the second entrant to the Royal Rumble, Mysterio was able to eliminate 28 heavyweights. To accompany his big win, Rey-Rey was also showing off his big heart—a heart that almost cost him more than he bargained for. Letting his loyalty to fallen wrestler and friend Eddie Guerrero lead him into a feud with Randy Orton, Mysterio near-I lost the WrestleMania title shot that he fought for and won at the Royal Rumble. Luckily for Rey. Smackdown General Manager Teddy Long declared Mysterio would remain in the little

match, a declaration that enabled him to win the Smackdown World title at WM 22.

Eye-Catcher: The upward pointed camera angle gives height and elevated stature to the 5'3" Royal Rumble winner who pulled off a huge upset.

Also In The Issue: 60-Minute Q&A: James J. Dillon ... "Citizen Kane & Other Classics: The Best Movie Roles For The Big Red Machine" "The Styles-Daniels-Joe Dance Marathon: No Need To Stop!" ... "The Heart Of A Hart, The Talent Of A Hart: Is Teddy's Head His Only Obstacle To Greatness?" "Sting Or Sting: The Makeup Of A Man Or ... The Make Up Of A Man."



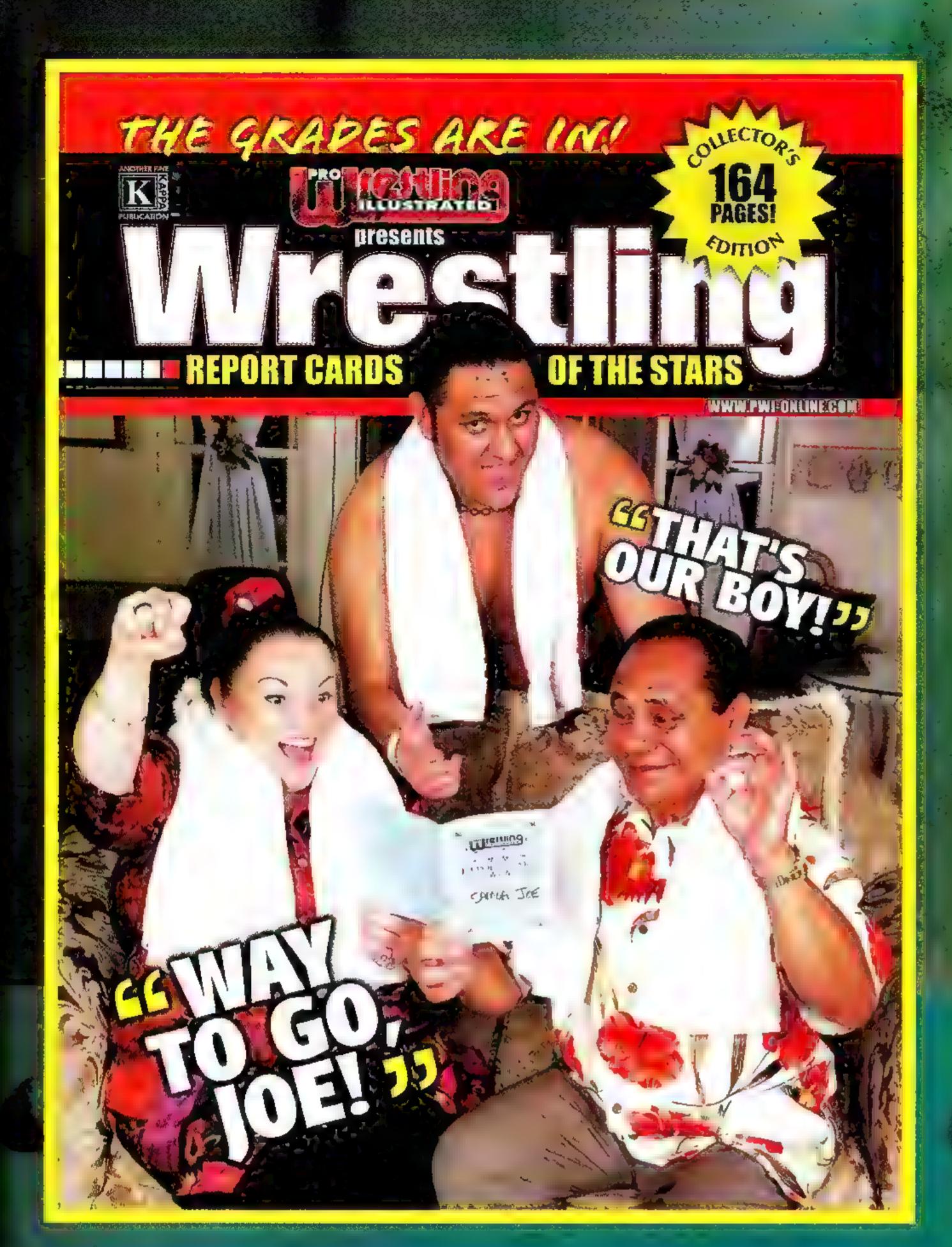


Cover Story: The champ has had a rough ride. Since John Cena's 2005 move to Raw, he has been unconvincing as a fan favorite. Amid a few cheers (mainly from the female and young male audiences), many boos persisted. This cover story details a few methods to cure Cena of this problem but the most puzzling aspect was that the fans "just don't know what they dislike about him, but it is something." The story commanded, "It's Time For Us To Stop Ganging Up On Cena," prompted by Cena's Litle defense against Triple-H at WrestleMania 22. Our readers must have agreed because, soon after, Cena went on to claim the number-one spot in the 2006 "PWI 500" as well as

win 36 percent of PWI readers' votes to become the 2006 Wrestler of the Year.

Eye-Catcher: The cover line "Mob Hit" was apropos considering Cena's WrestleMania entrance, when he donned a 1920s gangster suit and carried an Uzi.

Winners And Losers" ... "X Division At The Crossroads Is It The Division That Makes The Wrestlers — Or The Wrestlers That Make The Division?" ... "Winning With Honor: Super 8 Champ Davey Richards Charts His Path To Superstardom" Q&A: Monty Brown.



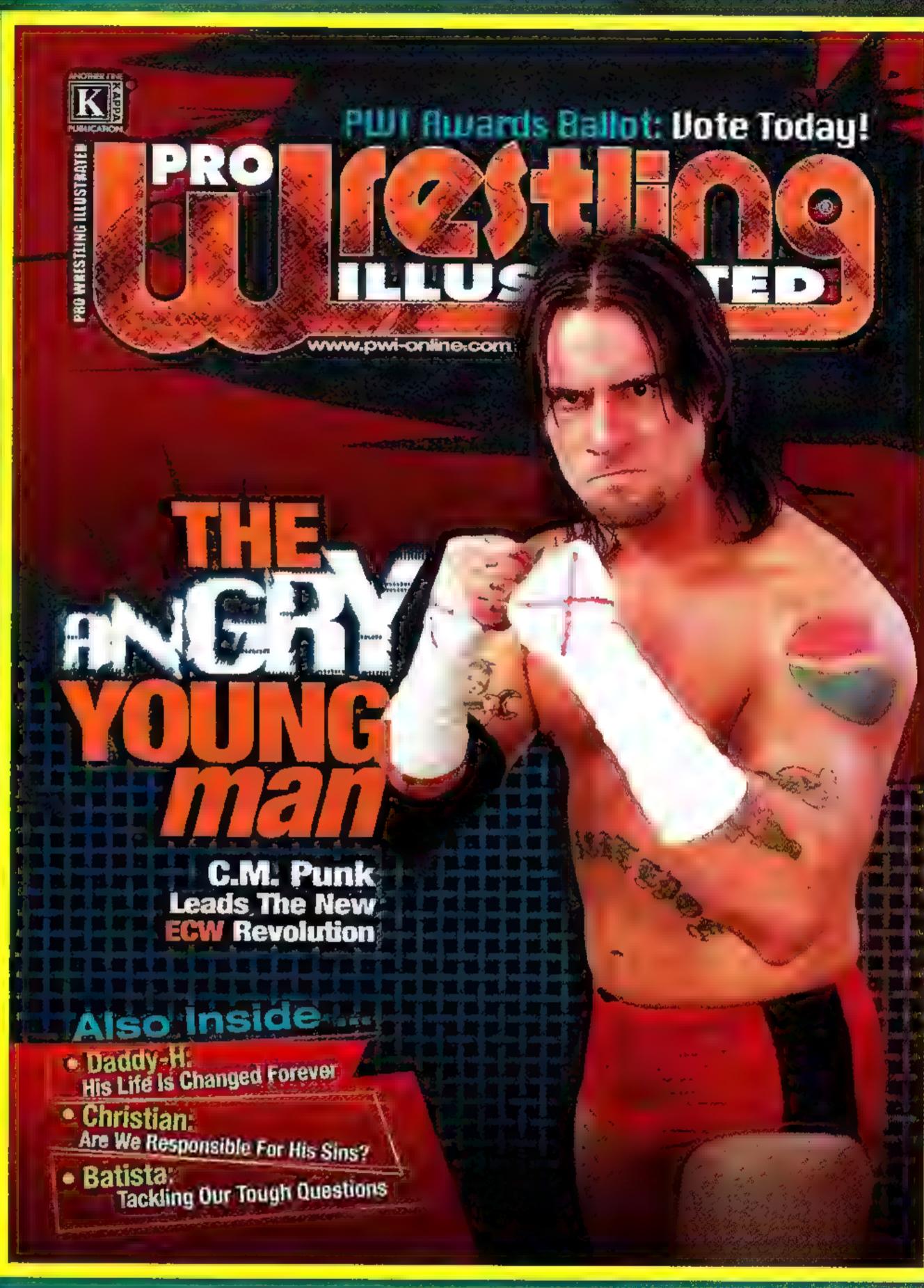


Cover Story: In this annual collector's edition of the PWI Report Cards Of The Stars, Samoa Joe received aces across the board. In fact, only Rey Mysterio Jr. scored as well as Joe in 2006. The Report Cards analyzed the performances of the top talent in the major companies: WWE, TNA, OVW, and ROH. Fifty wrestlers and tag teams were judged on the areas of goal achievement, marketability, reperfoire, career growth, and overall value, receiving letter grades ranging from F to A+. Both Joe and Mysterio excelled amongst stars such as John Cena, Edge, Kurt Angle, Triple-H, A-J. Styles, Bobby Lashley, C-M. Punk, and 41 others. That sure made Mama and Daddy proud!

eye-Catcher: This Seanoa family portrait was inspired by an in-office photo shoot, featuring our editors posing as Samoa Joe, Mom, and Dad.

Also In The Issue: Also receiving high marks were Edge, Shawn Michaels, Trish Stratus, America's Most Wanted, Kurt Angle, Chris Benoit, Christian Cage, John Cena, Bryan Danielson, Mickie James, Rob Van Dam, Shelton Benjamin, Booker T, Carlito, Christopher Daniels, Ric Flair, The James Gang, and Sting. The lowest grades in the class went to Monty Brown, The Great Khali, The Naturals, and The Spirit Squad, each receiving an overall value grade of C-.



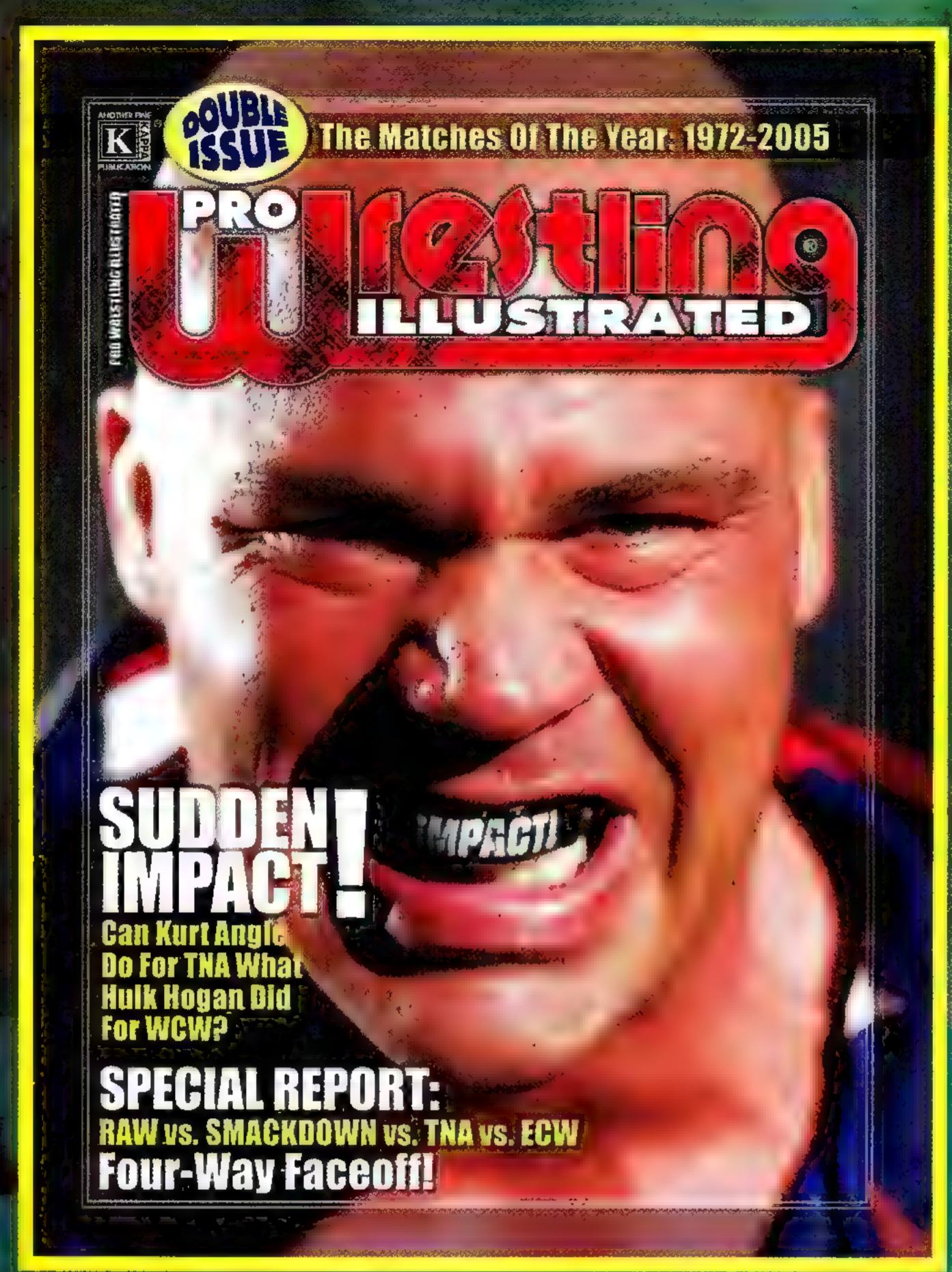


Cover Story: The reemergence of ECW as a WWE brand came with a flood of mixed reactions. Some fans were eager to relive the experience as it was, other younger fans anticipated finally being able to see what all the fuss was about. Still, others were more skeptical, realizing this ECW could never be what the old ECW was, especially under the WWE banner. More skeptics rose to the surface as McMahon brought Test, Hardcore Holly, Matt Striker, and vampire Kevin Thorn to the hardcore promotion. But there was some lingering hope for the legendary brand as C.M. Punk of Ring of Honor fame became a top star. Most interesting was WWE's choice to bring Punk in as is. There were no

changes made to his persona or name, as is often done with new WWE talent. We at PWI deemed him "The 'New ECW' Wrestler Even The 'Old ECW' Fans Won't Boo," and Punk's following of enthusiastic supporters breathed new life into the revived brand.

Eye-Catcher: Punk as is Tattoos, greased hair, piercings, and even the same black and red ring attire. WWE made no changes to Punk, and neither did we.

Also In The Issue: "Brace Yourself, Triple-H: Daddyhood Will Change Your Life Forever" "We Got A Lot, We Wanted More: Did We Force Christian To The Dark Side?" Press Conference: Batista.





Cover Story: It all started with a concerned Vince McMahon. Vince leared for Kurl Angle's health, and, in the end, Angle was grudgingly released from his WWE contract. Then came the surprise announcement of 2006: Angle had signed with TNA. Many hoped his star-power would do for TNA what Hulk Hogan's defection from the WWF eventually did for WCW. Although Angle's September debut on Impact was met with far less lanfare than the tickertape parade that welcomed 'The Hulkster' to WCW 12 years prior, industry expert Thomas Pilliard declared, "Like Hogan, whose arrival instantly legitimized WCW. Angle has the opportunity to carry TNA into the national spotlight on his reputation alone." Angle's debut definitely gave legs to TNA. The Angle signing finally convinced Spike TV executives to

bump TNA into a more lucrative time slot: Thursday nights, 9 p.m. Eastern time. Angle's jump from the largest wrestling promotion in the world seemed to lift TNA to a new level of competition with WWE.

Eye-Catcher: Angle made an impact not only on TNA, but also by mugging for TNA's official photographer, Lee South, with a new variation of his old mouth guard.

Also In The Issue: "The Most Important 'Title' In Wrestling: Who Is The Future Of The Industry'?" ... "Raw vs. Smackdown vs. ECW vs. TNA: Four-Way Faceoff!" The Greatest Showdowns Of All-Time: PWI Looks Back At 34 Matches Of The Year Press Conference: The Big Show.



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Some Words Of Wisdom From A Man Who Knows

Since becoming TNA's director of talent relations, Terry Taylor has seen the promotion's best and brightest talents up close. As a brightest talents up close. As a result, A.J. Styles' recent change of attitude compelled Taylor to contact INSIDE WRESTLING with this impassioned plea



A Special Analysis By Terry Taylor

T MAKES ME feel awfully old to admit this, but my relationship with Stu Saks and the crew at INSIDE WRESTLING goes back almost 25 years now. Sure, there have been times when the editorial staff of this magazine and I didn't necessarily see eye-to-eye, but I've always had the utmost respect for the job the media has done in promoting this sport and giving exposure to young up-and-coming athletes.

That's because I used to be one of those up-and-coming athletes back in the early-1980s. I actually sent Stu a "thank you" card the first time my name was mentioned in *PWI*—that's how much that little blurb meant to me. It was a validation from an outside source, an objective critique of my performance that wasn't colored by promotional politics or jealousies. I paid attention to what I read in the magazines.

In 1987, I was the Universal Wrestling Federation TV champion, going into a title unification match against the NWA TV champion, Nikita Koloff. Stugave me a call and asked me to write a piece for this very magazine, outlining how I planned to beat Koloff. I hate to say it, but I blew Stu off at the time. I lost that match.

A couple of years later, right after my infamous run as The Red Rooster in the WWF, Stu called again. He wanted me to write about my experience living



The A.J. Styles we knew and loved would never resort to such tactics as choking Samoa Joe out with a steel chair. The Styles we knew would use his power and agility to out-maneuver his opponent—well, things have changed.

I made a lot of mistakes in my career. I let shady managers and promoters cloud my judgment. I let title belts come between me and my friends and my fans. In short, I have made the same mistakes A.J. is making right now.

Although I am the director of talent relations for TNA, I'm not writing this as a TNA official. I am writing this as

someone who doesn't want to see such a talented wrestler make such a potentially damaging mistake.

One of the most enjoyable periods of my career was my partnership with "Gentleman" Chris Adams in the UWF. We won the tag belts and were considered one of the top three or four teams in the country at the time. But I wasn't enjoying it. When I Took back now, I can see I just didn't realize what Chris and I had, and how far we could have gone as a team.

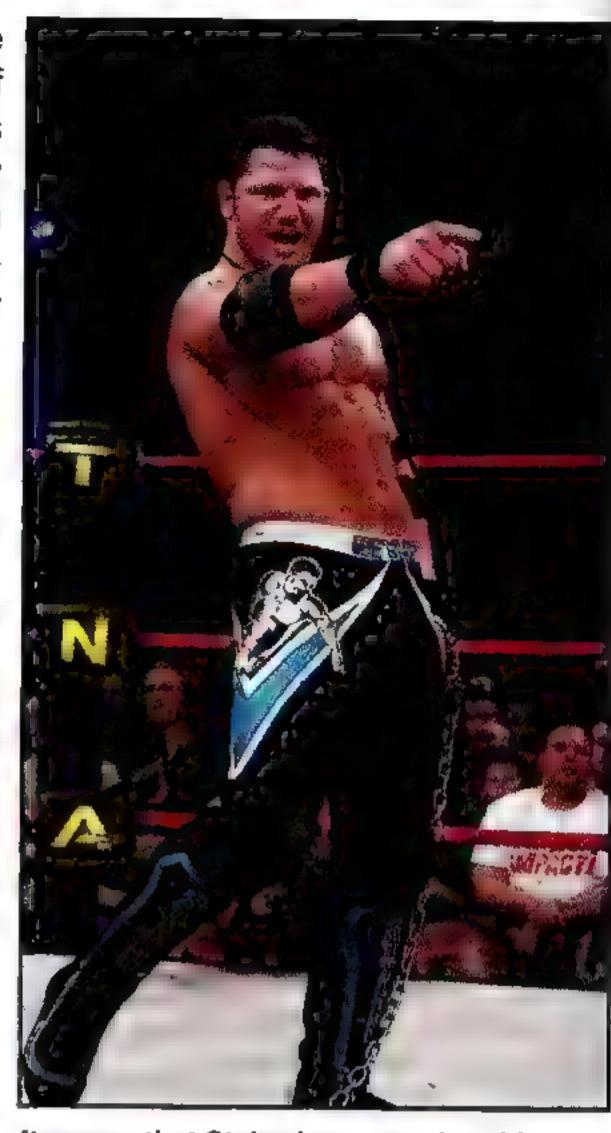
Instead of enjoying that run, I had one eye squarely focused on singles success. Chris and I were on a roll, and wins were coming easily. I got a little (no a lot) arrogant and my goals became very selfish. I tried to convince the UWF matchmakers that I should get shots at the heavyweight

ry—to tell my story in my own words. I couldn't do it. Things were still so fresh in my mind that I just couldn't get the perspective and distance I wanted to address a subject that left me pretty deeply conflicted at the time. I blew him off again.

A few weeks ago, I saw something that made me pick up the phone, call Stu, and offer to finally take him up on his offer and write a story for him. What I saw was A.J. Styles making the biggest mistake of his life.

point, instead of seeing Chris as my partner and my closest friend in the world, he became the anchor that was holding me back from becoming the biggest star in prowrestling. I came to hate Chris.

One night, I got so caught up in my own world that I showed up late to the arena and Chris was forced to defend the belts by himself. I got there just in time to make the save and take the credit, but I was never man enough to take responsibility and acknowledge the fact that my own irresponsibili-



It seems that Styles has come into his own personal "Attitude" era in his career. He has become a know-it-all, even blaming former tag partner Christopher Daniels for his Genesis loss to Christian Cage.

ty could have gotten my partner injured or cost us the belts.

My jealousies and insecurities eventually got the best of me, and I attacked Chris. I turned my back on my fans and my friend.

At Genesis, A.J. Styles blamed his partner, Christopher



The company we keep says a lot about who we are. Recently, Styles has adopted some new comrades. Hopefully, "The Phenomenal One" knows what he's doing getting mixed up with manipulators such as Scott Steiner and Christian Cage.



Even though Styles has taken on some new methods of destruction (left), he still utilizes his same trusted moves. Unfortunately for ex-friends such as Rhino (right), the force seems more lethal than ever.

Daniels, for his loss to Christian Cage. Just like I did 20 years earlier, A.J. has let personal paranoia, jealousy, and insecurity lead him down the wrong path.

In my opinion, Styles is one of the most talented athletes I have ever seen in the ring. He is already a three-time NWA World champion and four-time X division champion, but his potential greatness dwarfs even those lofty achievements. Together, he and Daniels could have become the most dominant team of this decade. More importantly than that, he had a true friend and ally in Daniels. A true friend in this sport is absolutely invaluable. Without a friend or partner to keep you grounded, you can

lose perspective. You start feeling entitled to title shots and favorable treatment.

It isn't until the fans stop cheering for you that you realize how important they are, how much their encouragement means when things aren't going well during a match. Or how much their letters of support means during the inevitable low points in your career.

While turning against Chris helped me get my hands on the TV title for a few months, I quickly dropped out of title contention after that. I was in a deep slump when I agreed to sign with the WWF and eventually adopted the Red Rooster persona. That WWF run proved to be a major disappointment for me. I had mixed success in a subsequent run in WCW until I retired from active competition in 1995.

My decision to turn against

Chris had a dramatic effect on

the remainder of my career.

When I look at A.J., I'm looking

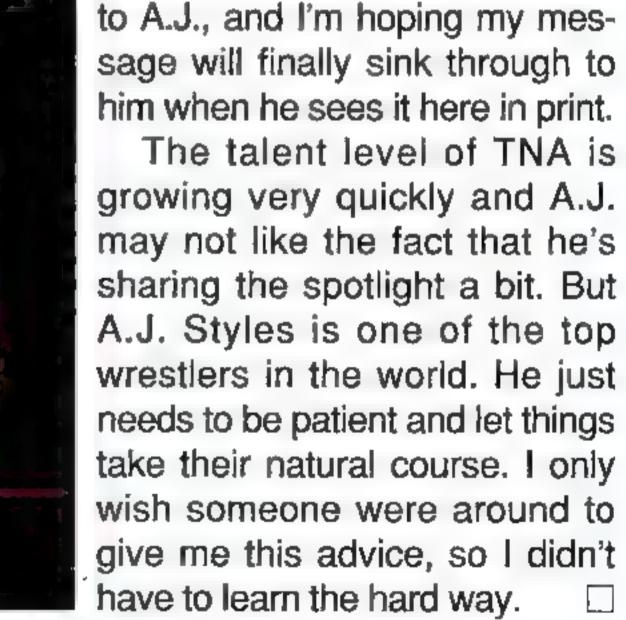
at a younger version of myself. I

have tried to talk to A.J. several

times now without success. So

I'm writing this as an open letter

Chris Adams always watched Terry Taylor's back while they were UWF tag team champions, but Taylor now admits that he didn't show the same consideration for his late partner (left). If Styles doesn't heed Taylor's advice, he may find himself in a career rut, as Taylor did during his WWF run as The Red Rooster (below, against The Honky Tonk Man).





Bobby Lashley

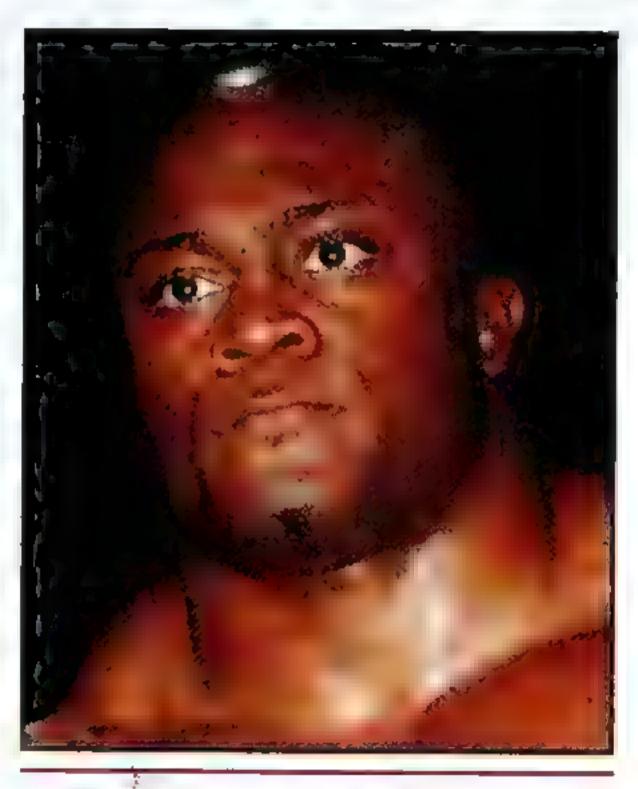
"I want to be a champion the fans can respect"

N A SPORT where braggadocio is a way of life and style often trumps substance, ECW champion Bobby Lashley has always preferred to do his talking in ring. The massively muscled three-time collegiate wrestling champion, four-time All-American, two-time Armed Forces champion, and silver medalist at the Conseil International du Sport Militaire World championships has worked hard to expand his repertoire in the professional ranks. Despite a health scare last year that temporarily forced him out of the ring, Lashley hasn't missed a beat.

Lashley has earned the respect of many of his veteran peers by patiently paying his dues in the mid-card over the past several years while working steadily toward headliner status. Although power wrestling will always be Lashley's bread and butter, he has worked to execute many of his signature suplexes and slams with greater crispness and consistency. He has also gradually begun to feel more at ease on the microphone.

The 30-year-old champion recently granted an interview to Contributing Writer Bill Meltzer to discuss the changes in his career since moving to ECW, his amateur career, his transition to pro wrestling, and his non-wrestling interests. Said Meltzer, "Because he's intensely focused on his wrestling career, Bobby is very matter-of-fact and serious when he talks about wrestling, but he's got a lighthearted side, too."

Q: Bobby, it looks like you've been coming into your own ever since coming to ECW.



"I've gotten a little sick of guys like Kennedy thinking they can take liberties with me. Like I said before, if you show me respect, we've got no problem. But if you disrespect me, I gotta fight fire with fire sometimes."

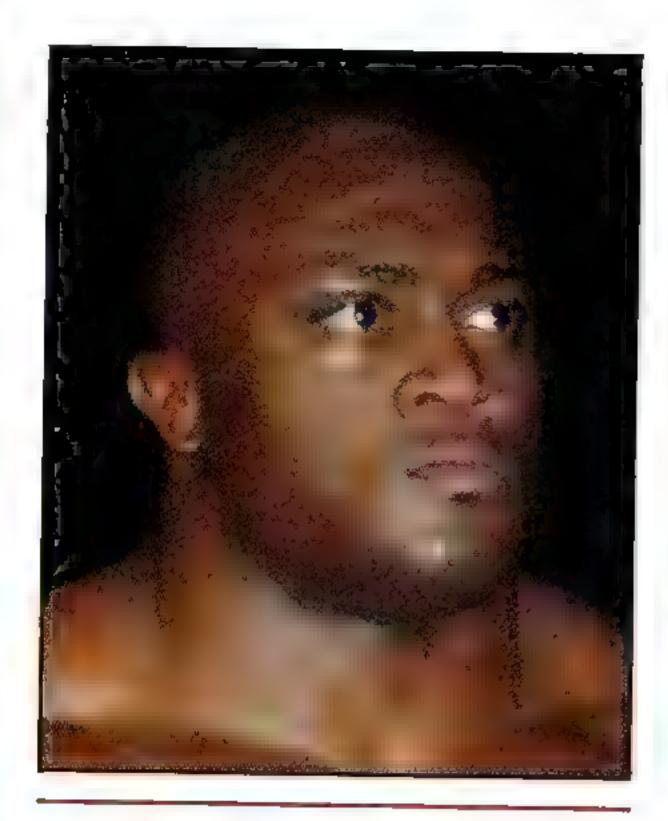
You have to be happy with the move, even apart from winning the belt.

- A: Definitely. I learned a lot on Smackdown, but winning the ECW championship is a big step for me. I want to be a champion the fans can respect.
- Q: It's no secret, though, that there has been a lot of behind-the-scenes unrest on the ECW brand. How has that affected you?
- A: I can't worry about that stuff. It's beyond my control. Besides, I

don't see it as new ECW guys vs. old ECW guys. All I ask is to be shown respect, and I give that respect right back. I haven't had any problems personally. Aside from my opponents who are after what I got, everyone has been great to me.

- Q: You've shown a decidedly more aggressive approach in the ring lately. It's not an exaggeration to say you flatout snapped against Ken Kennedy. Does that show of temper work for you or against you?
- A: It can help you ... or hurt you. Flippin' out every once in a while can make your opponent a little bit leery of you. A little respectful fear is a good thing. I've gotten a little sick of guys like Kennedy thinking they can take liberties with me. Like I said before, if you show me respect, we've got no problem. But if you disrespect me, I gotta fight fire with fire sometimes.
- Q: Do you think nice guys finish last in ECW?
- A: No. Nice guys can finish first—if they're mean enough (laughs).
- Q: Fair enough. Do you view the ECW championship as a steppingstone to WWE main-event status or is your main goal to get ECW's rebuilt identity on track?
- A: As long as I'm with ECW, my goal is to represent ECW. Being champion is a lot of responsibility, and I take that seriously. But, like I said to your other question, I'm not the booker or promoter.





"When I hear some guys I knew from amateur wrestling diss pro wrestling, I'm like, 'You've got no idea how beat up you get doing this. You got no idea what taking a bump eight feet in the air does to you.""

I'll do whatever they ask of me, but everyone knows I want to be the best at what I do. I'm a competitor.

Q: In your time as ECW champion, you've already taken a wide array of opposition from all three WWE brands, ranging

from Kennedy,
Test, and Bob Holly to Rob Van Dam
and Kenny Dykstra. Is it easier or
harder to face
such a wide variety
of styles, as opposed to wrestling
a lengthy series
against a single
opponent?

A: I love the variety. You know, beat 'em up, move on to the next sucker (laughs). No, actually, it forces you to be your best every night, and it really helps you improve as a wrestler in the ring. It's more exciting that way, both for the fans and for me.

Q: You are the first African-American wrestler to hold the ECW title. Does

that have any special meaning for you, especially in light of all the attention Tony Dungy got earlier this year as the first African-American coach of a Super Bowl champion?

A: Well, you always want to represent and be a role model. I'm



Often compared to "The Next Big Thing" Brock Lesnar, Lashley's dominance over The Big Show proved he should be judged on his own merits. Many fans already think he is in the same league as Raw World champion John Cena.

happy for Tony Dungy. But, in this business, Booker has been the Smackdown champ, Ron Simmons was the WCW champ. It's not really a big issue anymore to be the first in ECW. I just want to be known as the best wrestler to hold the ECW title. That's the biggest thing to me.

Q: In your opinion, which is harder—amateur wrestling or pro wrestling?

A: Apples and oranges, man. Both of them are incredibly demanding physically and there's no margin for error. But when I hear some guys I knew from amateur wrestling diss pro wrestling, I'm like, "You've got no idea how beat up you get doing this. You got no idea what taking a bump eight feet in the air does to you." The good thing is that most [amateur] guys nowadays have more respect for pro wrestling. That's one of the really big contributions [Kurt] Angle has made. Hopefully guys like me and Shelton Benjamin



Lashley has attempted to be a role model during his ECW title reign. He's a people's champion, always keeping the fans in mind when in the ring. He feels it is their support that keeps him atop the hardcore brand.

have also helped tear down that wall a little bit, too.

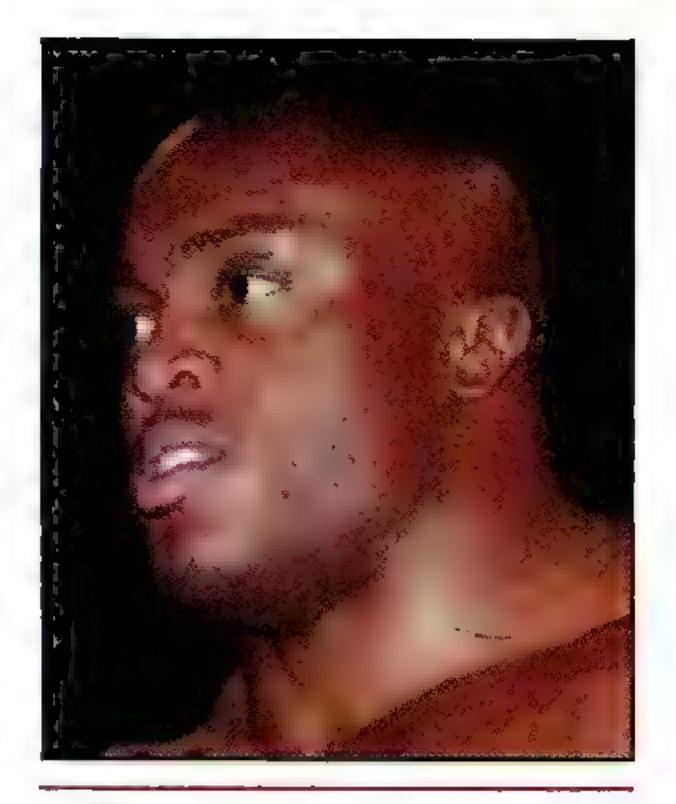
Q: Looking back, what's been the biggest adjustment for you between amateur and pro?

- A: It's a totally different set of goals and demands. In amateur wrestling, you're wrestling for yourself and for the points. Here, you are wrestling for the fans, so you have to change your approach. The other thing, for me personally, is that I wrestled at about 170 to 177 pounds as an amateur, and I'm competing now in the 275-pound range without raising my body fat. It was a lot of work to build that and maintain it.
- Q: With your travel schedule,
 - what's the key to maintaining your conditioning? Must be hard to get to the gym as often as you'd like.
- A: It's a matter of discipline, which was something the Army experience really hammered into me. You have to make a point of going to the gym, tired or not. Diet is a big part of it, too. One of the biggest mistakes people make is to skip meals, especially breakfast. I'm always eating, but it's healthy foods that give you energy. One thing that's hard in this business is getting on a regular sleep schedule traveling on the road, but I try to do that.
- Q: Let me ask you about another amateur standout. When you first came to WWE, people constantly compared you to former WWE champion Brock Lesnar. Those comparisons seem to have quieted as

- your WWE career has developed at its own pace. Do you feel like you are being judged on your own merits now?
- A: I hope so, because I've always said from Day One that I just want to be my own man and do my own thing in the ring. People are gonna like Bobby Lashley or they aren't, and that's cool. Brock has his approach, I've got mine.
- Q: So I guess we won't be seeing you trying out for the NFL?
- A: Nah, not unless the Chiefs, Rams, or Broncos make me an offer I can't refuse (grins).
- Q: The Chiefs, the Rams, or the Broncos, Bobby? Are you trying to get politically correct



Competitors from all three brands have been challenging Lashley for the ECW title. Test was the most headstrong, but the ECW champ was on a mission to be a long-reigning titleholder and now Test is nowhere to be found.



"I've always said from
Day One that I just
want to be my own
man and do my own
thing in the ring.
People are gonna like
Bobby Lashley or they
aren't, and that's cool."

on me or do you not have a favorite football team?

- A: (Laughs) I'm a traveler. I was born in Junction City, Kansas, went to college in Missouri, and I live in Colorado Springs now, but I'm always on the road. Besides, I'm just an Army guy at heart. So, you know, I'm used to living all around in different areas of the country. But, all kidding aside, wrestling is what I love doing, and I wouldn't trade it for the world. This is my calling.
- Q: It's nice to hear someone who wants to be in this business for the long haul.
- A: Well, everyone's gotta do what they feel is right. I make a good living, and I want to wrestle because I love it. I never want to do it just for the money. My college degree is in business, and I try to be smart with my money. I never have to worry someday if my body tells me it's time to quit or I'm not in demand. My family deserves that. But my intention is for Bobby Lashley to be in the ring a long, long time and to be a fighting champion.

Colfins Roundiale

What Does The Future Hold For Wrestling Society X?

Photos by Mike Lano

"Who in their right mind wouldn't be skeptical of a wrestling program that airs on the same channel with masterpieces such as Engaged & Underage, My Super Sweet 16, and any of the 40 variations of The Real World and/or Road Rules?"

—Frank Ingiosi

FTER NEARLY AN entire year of speculation and anticipation, MTV's boldest venture into the professional wrestling market, Wrestling Society X, finally debuted in early-2007 to mixed reviews.

Fans of its high-intensity action and wild tempo hailed the promotion as some of the most exciting wrestling on television. Skeptics, on the other hand, billed WSX as a glori-

fied stunt show that caters to those fans who enjoy the worst aspects of today's sport.

The talent roster, which includes such names as Teddy Hart, Human Tornado, and Joey Ryan, plus established talent such as Sean Waltman, Vampiro, and Justin Credible, backs up the notion that WSX could conceivably play an important role in the future of the industry.

Still, it remains to be seen whether WSX can build and maintain a consistent audience, especially catering

to an MTV demographic with so many programming choices. Tapping into the professional wrestling market was a bold move for the entertainment giant, and something that could either help revolutionize the industry or simply become yet another failed attempt at innovation.

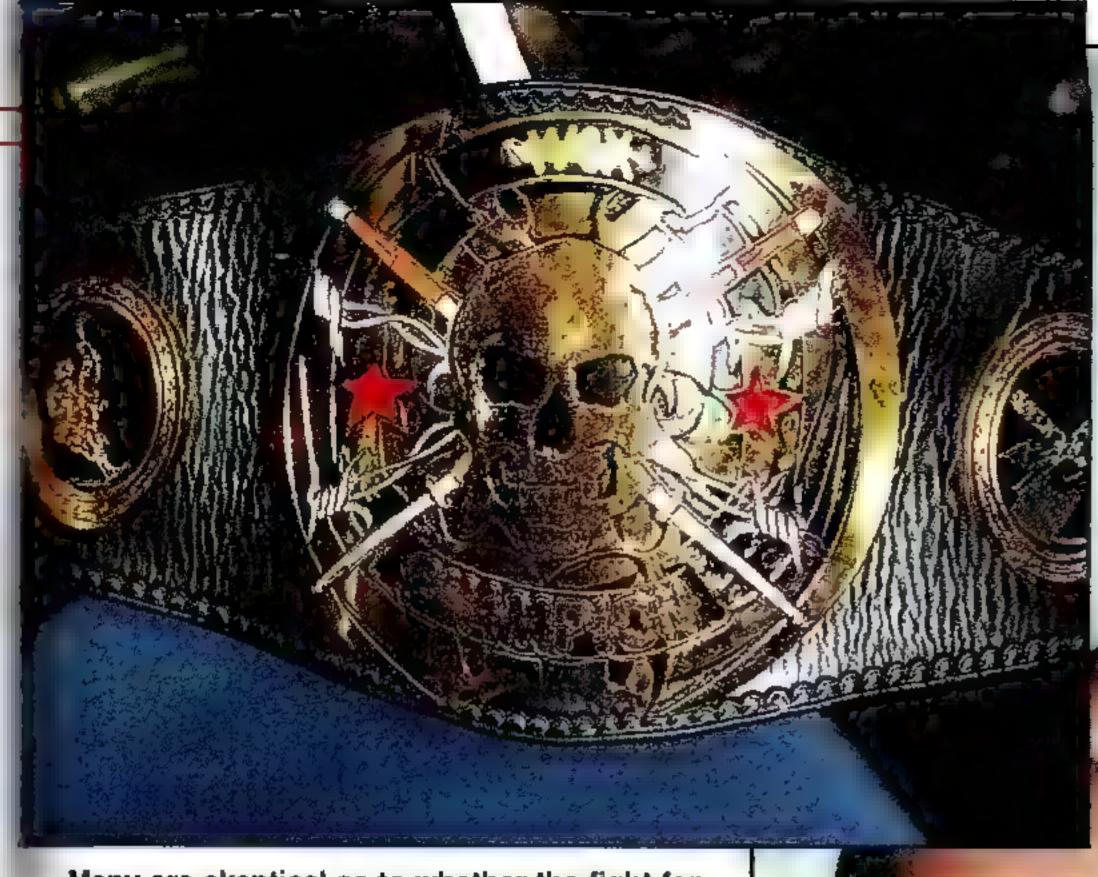
Even now, the future of WSX is in question. Its weekly program has been pulled from the MTV lineup. Big Vision Entertainment CEO Houston Curtis claims the program has not been canceled and could return to MTV's prime-time schedule or perhaps as a Friday night program on MTV2. In a worst-case scenario, Big Vision could shop WSX around to other networks.

Publisher Stu Saks sat down with Managing Editor Lisa Rocchi, Senior Writer Frank Ingiosi, and Contributing Writer C.F. Hunter to examine what WSX has contributed to the industry and its chances for survival.

STU SAKS: Welcome, everyone, to what I hope will be a free-flowing and open forum to



Fabian Kaelin has received mostly negative reviews for his role as the ring announcer for Wrestling Society X. Kaelin might find more success in WSX as G.Q. Money, his wrestling alter-ego.



Many are skeptical as to whether the fight for the WSX title belt will develop a loyal following on MTV (above). Unfortunately, the halfhour time slot gives viewers very little time to become familiar with the wrestlers (such as Kaos, right), no matter how intense they are.

discuss MTV's foray into professional wrestling, the surprisingly polarizing Wrestling Society X. Its future is in doubt right now, but we'll get to that later. I want to focus on the product itself. Why don't we go once around the room to sort of gauge what each of your initial impressions are on WSX. Ladies first, Lisa.

From what I've seen so far, Wrestling Society X has all the potential in the world to appeal to younger wrestling fans. It has tapped into the massive audience that tunes into MTV on a daily basis and showcases young talent that would never get that kind of exposure elsewhere. All in all, WSX could end up being pretty good, assuming it's given the chance to succeed.

SAKS: That's very optimistic of you, Lisa, and a good way to kick off today's forum. Now, if I had to guess which of us here would have a less "glass half full" view on WSX, I would be compelled to look in the direction of ...

FRANK INGIOSI: Who, me?

SAKS: Yes, you. What are your initial impressions of Wrestling Society X?

INGIOSI: Well, what can I say?

Who in their right mind wouldn't be skeptical of a wrestling program that airs on the same channel with masterpieces such as Engaged & Underage, My Super Sweet 16, and any of the 40 variations of The Real World and/or Road Rules? Oh, and what's with the WSX ring announcer and broadcast guys yelling the whole damn time? Is that supposed to be extreme?

C.F. HUNTER: So, I take it you're not a fan, Frank?

INGIOSI: Of the wrestlers, absolutely. Some of those guys are more than deserving of the spotlight, and it's about time they get some recognition. As for the program, let's just say I have my doubts.

SAKS: Fair enough. C.F., what is your perspective on the latest American foray into televised wrestling? Could Wrestling Society X ever make headway in your native Canada?

HUNTER: Wrestling is still very big in Canada, and I've always felt that the Canadian fans will generally give programs more of a chance than others who follow the industry. Still, I think WSX has a lot of work ahead of it before it will truly be accepted by Canadian fans, who tend to be very knowledgeable. In fact, the premiere episode of the show didn't air in Canada until well after the U.S., so we're already a bit behind the curve.

SAKS: Lisa, you mentioned earli-



er that by airing on MTV, Wrestling Society X could possibly draw in a younger audience. Both WWE and TNA have conceded that their programs are intended for more mature viewers, so is this necessarily a good thing in your opinion?

ROCCHI: From a business perspective, of course this is a good thing. Teenagers have become a very important demographic when it comes to sales and marketing. The fast-paced nature of the show, with musical acts and pyrotechnics, is right up most of their alleys.

from a business standpoint it makes sense for a promotion to go through MTV to reach its target audience. However, I'm a bit concerned with the fact that—to play off of what

Frank said—a station that airs Jackass now shows a professional wrestling program that features far more high-risk bouts than most.

INGIOSI: That's a good point that I hadn't entirely considered. In the first few episodes alone, WSX featured thumbtacks, wild camera angles, and explosions. Yes, that's right, I said explosions. Business is business, but the way WSX is being presented is akin to glorified backyard wrestling, which the world can absolutely do without. These wrestlers deserve better than this.

SAKS: So, if I'm correct, it seems as if all three of you believe that it was a smart marketing tactic to tap into MTV's viewership, but it seems that Big Vision is allowing its wrestlers to perform stunts that are

riskier than any being done in WWE or TNA. Maybe MTV executives are reconsidering WSX because they don't want to deal with that kind of liability. Getting back to the sport aspect of it, what about the wrestling and wrestlers? Is the talent enough to keep the promotion afloat?

there, so I don't think the quality of the athletes has anything to do with WSX's current problems. To most of these wrestlers, WSX is primarily an audition for getting a better gig elsewhere. So, while some of the wrestling—when they get down to it—is impressive, I can't see anyone staying around long enough to sustain the promotion. Then again, depending on what MTV decides, that may not be an issue.

HUNTER: Plus, for those of us who think TNA has trouble building up its talent and having great matches with only a one-hour timeslot, WSX's weekly half-hour makes it nearly impossible for anyone to connect with these guys. The show, as of now, does include additional matches on its website. but that assumes fans are clamoring for it enough to take the time to check it out there. So, basically, you end up with choppy, shortened matches with nearly no chance of showcasing the wrestlers' personalities.

ROCCHI: Still, does WSX actually need to focus more on wrestling, like TNA, or personalities, like WWE? It's on MTV! It just needs to look flashy and gain word of mouth recognition amongst the viewers. We'll just have to see whether MTV is willing to give WSX time to develop an audience or if Big Vision can get a one-hour timeslot on another network. Maybe the best scenario is moving to MTV2, where WSX could possibly get that hour.

SAKS: I'd like to wrap things up for today by posing a hypothetical scenario to all of you. It's this time next year: What is the status of Wrestling Society X? C.F., we'll start with you.

HUNTER: Stu, I wish I could be

WSX may survive this forced hiatus. MTV2 showed plenty of repeats of WSX during its initial run, so it could find a home there, or on another network such as Versus, which was the old Outdoor Life Network, or A&E. You just never know.

—Lisa Rocchi

more optimistic, but I don't see WSX making it for another three months, let alone an entire year. One problem is that WSX is too much of a wrestling show. If it had been more of a reality series that happened to be about wrestlers, it would have had a better chance of

making it on MTV.

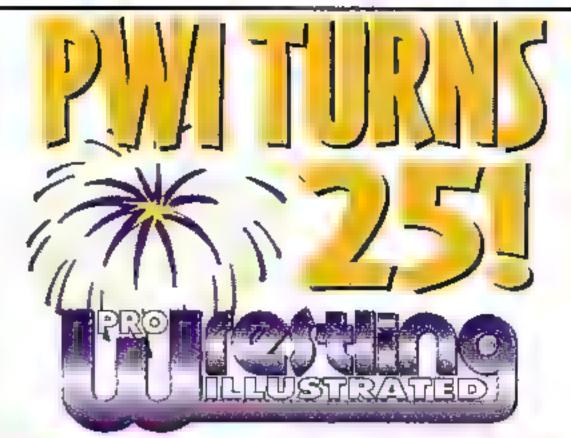
ROCCHI: I honestly believe that WSX may survive this forced hiatus. MTV2 showed plenty of repeats of WSX during its initial run, so it could find a home there, or on another network such as Versus, which was the old Outdoor Life Network, or A&E. You just never know.

INGIOSI: This time next year, WSX will exist only in the annals of wrestling lore and reruns on MTV2. Heck, it may be dead already. I think it's already had its hot minute of fame, and now the minuscule attention span of the targeted demographic will switch to whatever pop diva is shaving her head next.

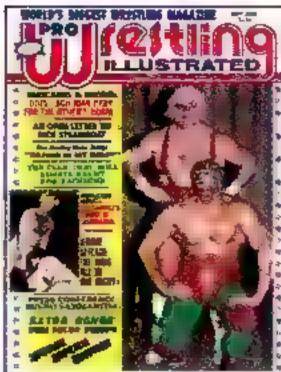
SAKS: Thank you all. It should be interesting to see what the future holds for Wrestling Society X.



While Wrestling Society X may have superb talent on its roster, including Vampiro and Sean Waltman, that unfortunately may not be enough to carry the program, as it is primarily the show itself that is widely criticized, not the wrestlers.







Pro Wrestling Illustrated recently celebrated its 25th year as the sport's number-one publication in a very special way. Those who subscribe to PWI or spotted it at the newsstand in time got a treat. Not only did PWI produce a silver anniversary special, but as an added bonus, we polybagged a re-print of our very first issue, from 1979!

If you missed it, you won't have to wait 25 more years for a follow-up. A limited amount of both issues are still available!

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NOVEMBER 15, 1985:

Makes his professional debut under the name Flash Borden as part of the stable Powerteam USA. The group cut a brief path of destruction through California.

APRIL 12, 1987:

Sting, now teaming with Rick Steiner in the UWF, wins the promotion's tag team championship. He had previously done so, on two occasions, with Eddie Gilbert.



MARCH 27, 1988:

Now the NWA's top fan favorite, Sting takes on then-World champion Ric Flair. The two battle to a memorable 45-minute draw at the first Clash Of The Champions on TBS.

MARCH 20, 1959:

Steve Borden is born in Omaha, Nebraska, a city in stark contrast to the flashy, boisterous persona its favorite son would adopt on his way to championship gold.

JUNE 14, 1986;

Borden changes his name from Flash to Sting and teams with former Powerteam USA member Jim Hellwig—then known as Rock and later as The Ultimate Warrior to form The Blade Runners

JULY 4, 1987:

Following the UWF's sale to Jim Crockett Promotions. Sting quickly becomes a lan lavorite and wins his inaugural Great American Bash match, defeating Thunderfoot.

MARCH 31, 1989:

Sting wins his first NWA singles championship by defeating Mike Rotundo to capture the TV championship He holds the belt for six months



66





INSIDE WRESTLING journeys back in time to examine the career of a superstar who has left a major imprint on the sport

JULY 23, 1989:

In what would become a classic feud, TV champion Sting and The Great Muta battle to a no-contest at The Great American Bash. As a result, he becomes the sole target of Gary Hart's stable.

JULY 7, 1990:

Sting's tenacity pays off with an NWA World title victory over arch-rival Ric Flair at The Great American Bash. His reign lasts four months.



AUGUST 25, 1991:

Bringing a new sense of credibility to the WCW U.S. title, Sting defeats "Stunning" Steve Austin to capture the gold. He later loses the belt to Rick Rude.

FEBRUARY. 6, 1990:

The Four Horsemen injure Sting's knee and kick him out of the legendary group. Sting had joined the Horsemen a few months earlier after the clique had turned fan favorite. Ric Flair considered him a threat to his NWA World title, prompting the betrayal.

JULY 4, 1991:

During a particularly brutal feud, Sting loses to Nikita Koloff in a vicious Russian chain match at The Great American Bash, held in Baltimore. It is remembered as one of the most humbling losses of Sting's career.

FEBRUARY 29, 1992:

Sting beats Lex
Luger at
Superbrawl to win
the WCW World
title. He would
drop the strap to
Big Van Vader five
months later





With Siling (Inc.)

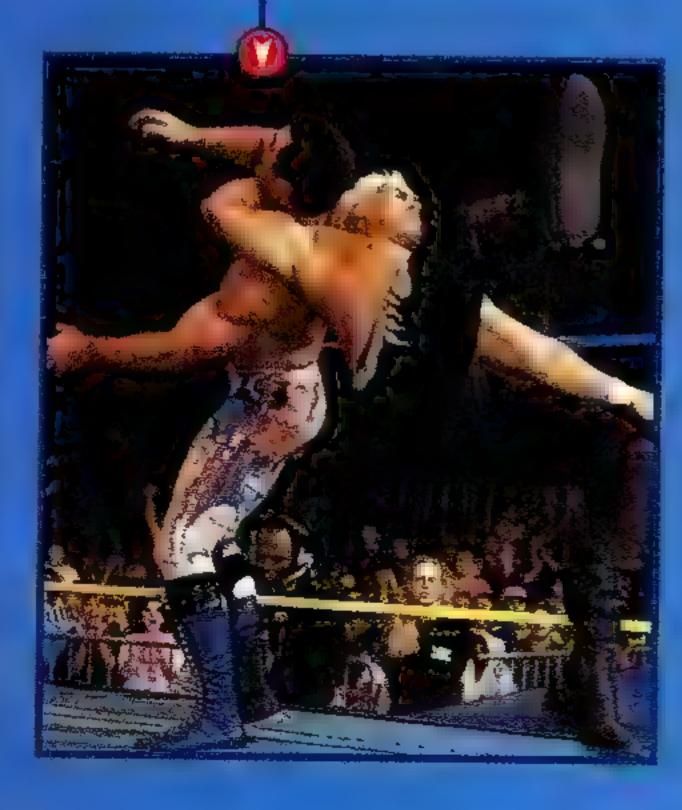


NOVEMBER 23, 1995:

Finally, Sting faces
Hulk Hogan on an
episode of Nitro,
gaining an
unsatisfying
disqualification
victory. It is widely
believed that the
tremendous fan
support for Sting
during this match led
to Hogan's heel turn
the following year.

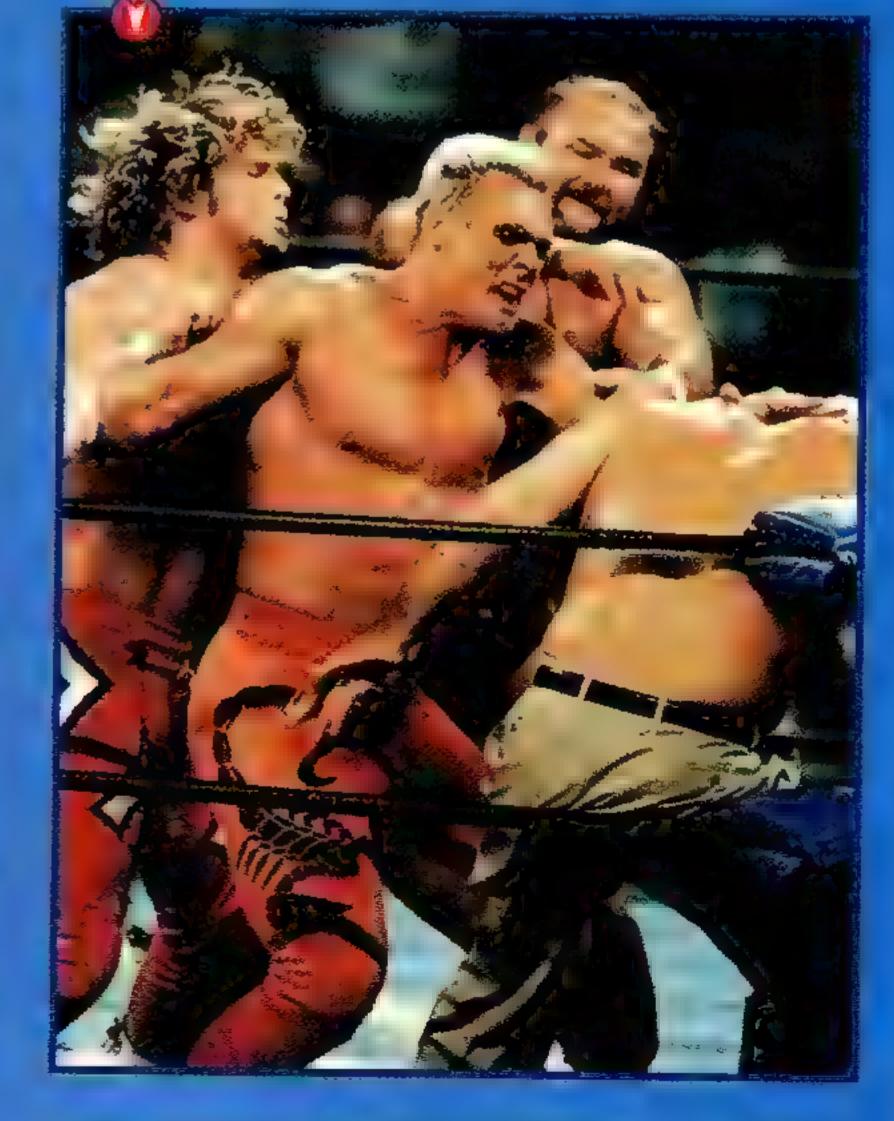
APRIL 17, 1994:

Sting defeats Rick
Rude for the WCW
International title at
Spring Stampede.
Harley Race accidentally hits his
charge Rude with
a steel chair enabling Sting to
score the pinfall



OCTOBER 29, 1995:

Proving that no good deed goes unpunished. Sting is once again on the wrong side of a Four Horsemen beatdown after seemingly joining forces with Ric Flair at Halloween Havoc.





SEPTEMBER 15, 1996:

After an impostor
Sting appeared with
the NWO on various
occasions and caused
the WCW faithful to
question whether the
real Sting had turned
against them, the real
Sting then turns his
back on the fans. It
was off to the rafters
from there.

MAY 24, 1998:

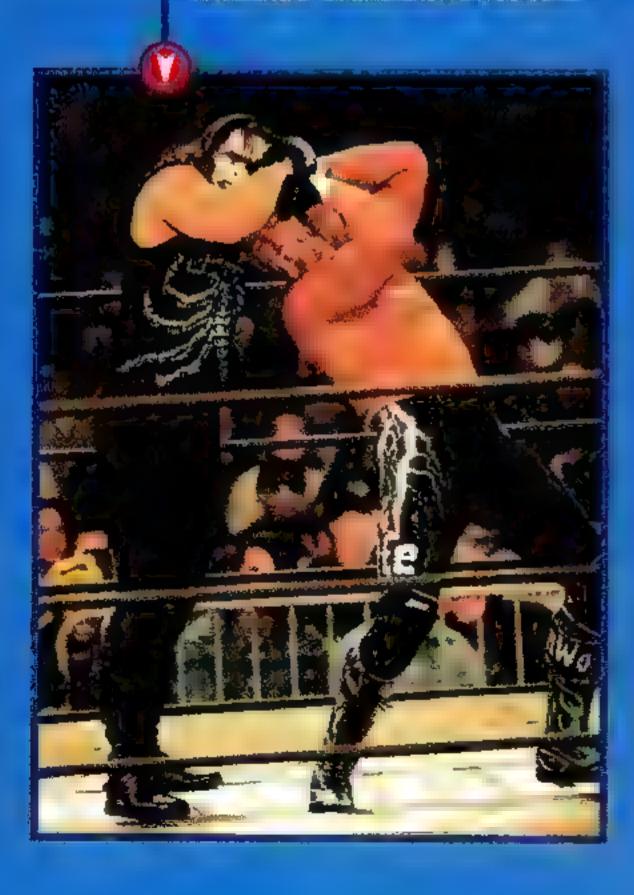
If you can beat them, join them. Sting becomes a member of the NWO's Wolfpac. As part of the fan favorite faction of the organization, Sting co-holds the WCW World tag team title with Kevin Nash.

SEPTEMBER 12, 1999:

Shocking everybody, but appealing to nobody, Sting takes a turn as a rulebreaking champion after defeating Hulk Hogan at Fall Brawl. Much like this title reign, his time as a rulebreaker doesn't last long.

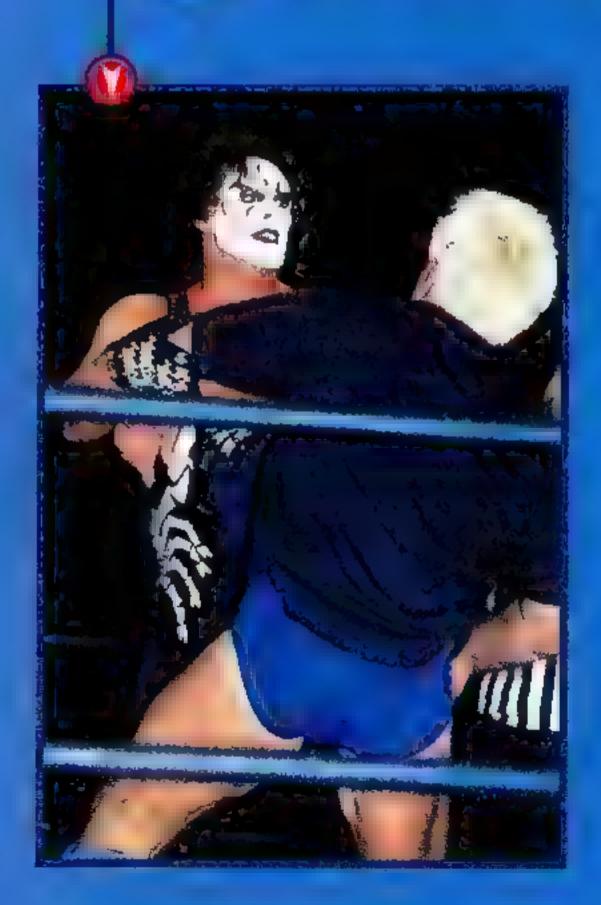
DECEMBER 28, 1997:

A year's worth of ominous appearances in the rafters of various arenas culminates with a WCW World title victory over Hollywood Hogan at Starrcade It is considered WCW's high point during its war with the WWF



MARCH 26, 2001:

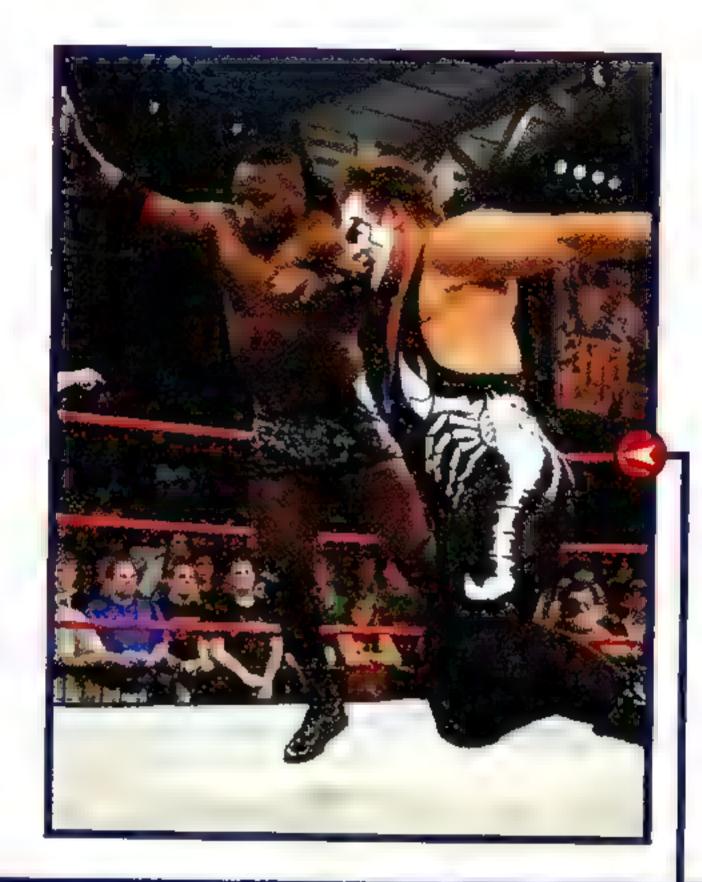
Rumors regarding the WWF's purchase of WCW turn out to be true. Sting closes out the linal match of WCW's existence with a bittersweet victory over longtime foe Ric Flair.



Wifesting time in a

DECEMBER 13, 2002:

Sting wins the World
Wrestling All-Stars
heavyweight title, defeating
Lex Luger. He would later
lose the strap in a title
unification match with thenNWA champion Jeff Jarrett.

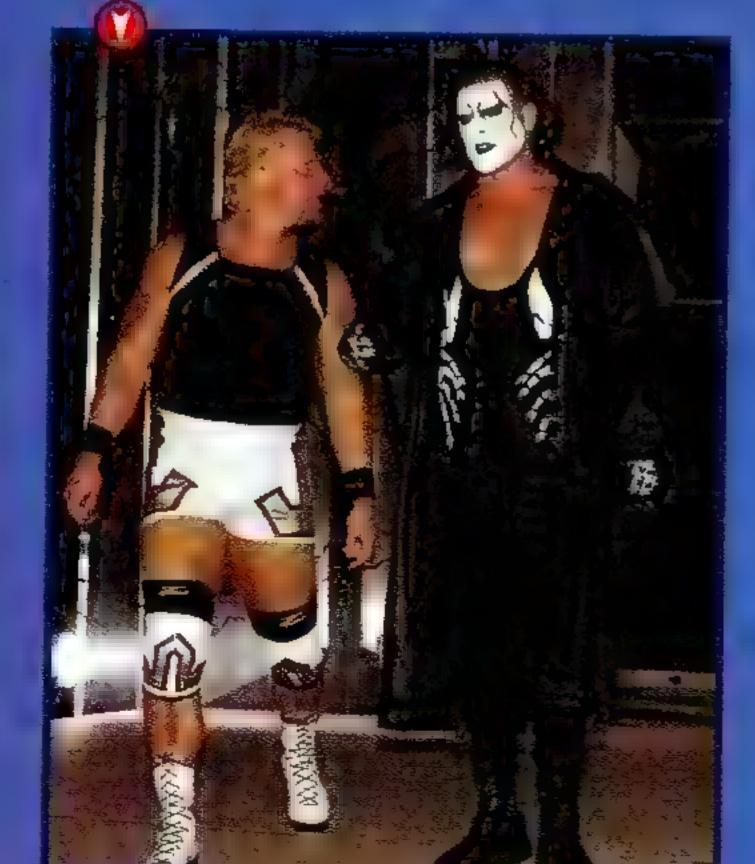


JANUARY 15, 2006:

After weeks of speculation,
Sting makes his full-time
return to professional
wrestling. He teams with
Christian Cage to defeat
Jeff Jarrett and Monty
Brown at TNA's Final
Resolution.

JUNE 18, 2003:

A brief hiatus with a few scattered appearances ends with Sting making his first appearance for the fledgling NWA-TNA. He teams with Jeff Jarrett to defeat NWA champion A.J. Styles and Syxx-Pac at the promotion's first anniversary show.



MARCH 12, 2006:

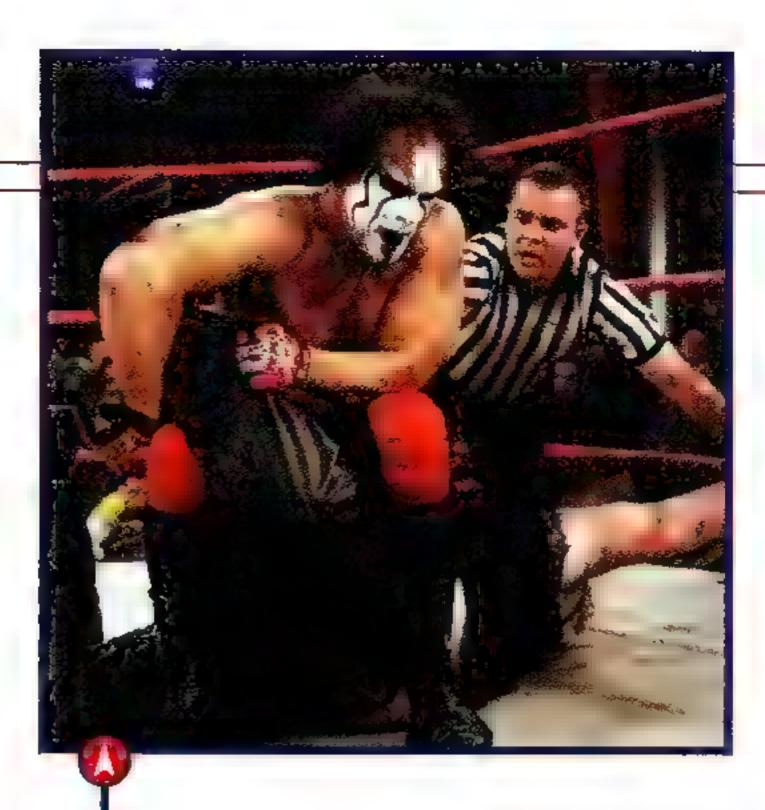
Seemingly back to his official retirement—sans face-paint—Steve Borden is provoked to return to TNA yet again after his family is thrust into his feud with Jeff Jarrett. The angry father was taken out by Scott Steiner at TNA's Destination X.





MAY 14, 2006:

Sting and Samoa Joe form a shaky tandem to defeat Jeff Jarrett and Scott Steiner at TNA's Sacrifice. Although Sting isn't certain of Joe's motives, he turns out to be a reliable partner.

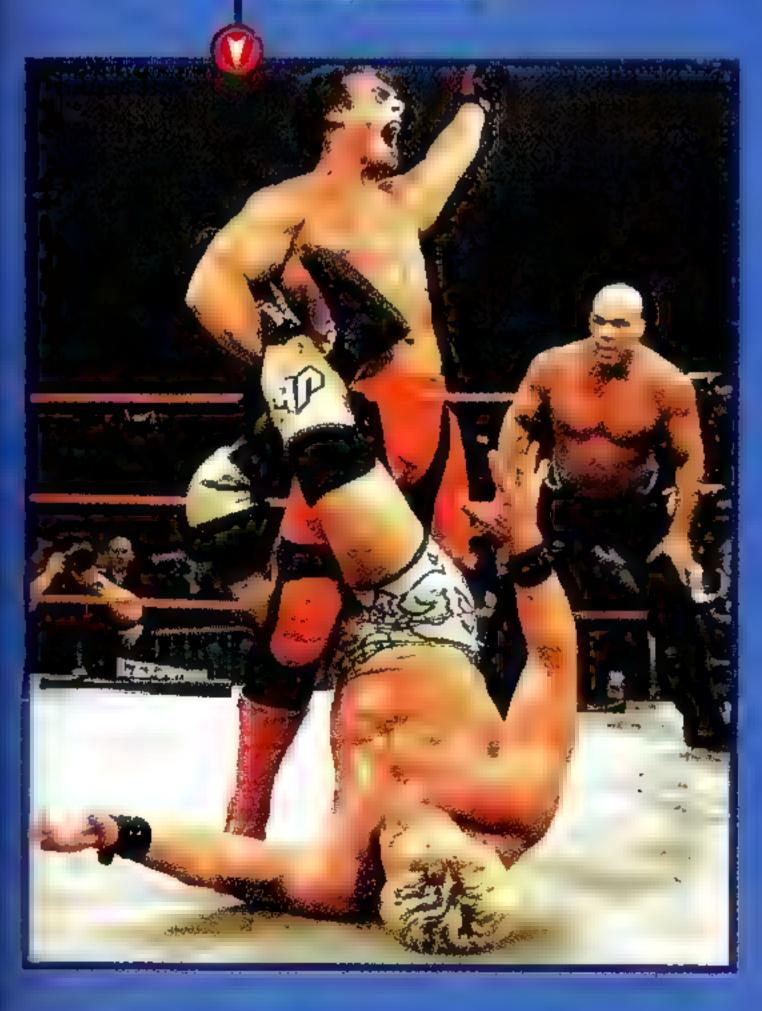


NOVEMBER 19, 2006:

In a strange turn of events, Abyss defeats Sting to capture the NWA World title via disqualification. The former champion then makes it his mission to unearth the secrets of Abyss' past.

OCTOBER 22, 2006:

Putting his livelihood on the line Sting defeats Jeff Jarrett in a Title vs. Career match at Bound For Glory, becoming the NWA World champion in the process



JANUARY 14, 2007;

Perhaps more focused on punishing Abyss than capturing the gold. Sting loses in a three-way NWA World title match also involving Christian Cage and defending champ Abyss at Final Resolution.

Check Out This Shot!

Grin and bear it, Ric. The 58-year-old Flair began the 2007 Royal Rumble on January 28 as the number-one entrant and battled against Kenny Dykstra, Matt Hardy, Finlay, and Edge. It was the 48-year-old Finlay who delivered this wallop that no doubt weakened Flair, helping Edge eliminate him from the Royal Rumble. This legend might have been the first out, but another legend, the 45-year-old Undertaker, won the event.

Photo By George Napolitano 72 INSIDE WI

ROLL CALL OF CHAMPIONS

For period ended March 15, 2007

Championships highlighted in bold on the "Roll Call Of Champions" have changed hands since our previous issue. The information under the championship listing indicates the date that champion won the title, who the former champion was, and where the match took place.

ALL JAPAN INTERNATIONAL TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: TOSHIAKI KAWADA & TAIYO KEA (February 17, 2007; from Ro'Z & Suwana; Tokyo, Japan)

ALL*JAPAN JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: KATSUHIKO NAKAJIMA (February 17, 2007; from Shuji Kondo; Tokyo, Japan)

ALL JAPAN TRIPLE CROWN CHAMPION: MINORU SUZUKI (September 3, 2006; from Taiyo Kea; Sapporo, Japan)

AMERICAN WRESTLING ASSOCIATION HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: STEVE CORINO (January 7, 2007; from Ric Converse; Pottstown, PA)

BORDER CITY WRESTLING CAN-AM HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: ABYSS (September 15, 2005; beat Bobby Roode; Windsor, Ontario)

BORDER CITY WRESTLING TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: JIMMY JACOBS & PHIL ATLAS (July 22, 2005; from Danny Daniels & N8 Mattson; Windsor, Ontario)

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: FREAK NASTTY (January 28, 2006; from Fred Sampson; Newark, DE)

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION MID-ATLANTIC CHAMPION: BRYAN LOGAN (October 7, 2006; from Mike Tobin; Newark, DE)

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: DAN ECKOS & SEAN ROYAL

(January 27, 2007; from The Valedictorians; Newark, DE)

HEARTLAND WRESTLING ASSOCIATION HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: BRIAN JENNINGS (January 2, 2007; from Jon Moxley, Cincinnati, OH)

HEARTLAND WRESTLING ASSOCIATION TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: JAKE & DAVE CRIST (October 20, 2006; from Andre Hart & Richard Phillips; Cincinnati, OH)

IWA MID-SOUTH HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: CHUCK TAYLOR (September 30, 2006; from Toby Klein; Midlothian, IL)

IWA MID-SOUTH LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: JOSH ABERCROMBIE (January 21, 2006; beat Tyler Black; Midlothian, IL)

IWF AMERICAN CHAMPION: TRAVIS BLAKE (January 21, 2007; from Chris Steeler; West Paterson, NJ)

IWF HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: TONY TORRES (November 17, 2006; from Shawn Donavan; West Paterson, NJ)

IWF TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: SHANE O'BRIEN & AARON STRIDE (January 20, 2007; from Steve Camacho & Mike Durnin; West Paterson, NJ)

IWGP HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: HIROSHI TANAHASHI (July 17, 2006; title was vacant; Sapporo, Japan)

IWGP INTERNATIONAL TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: GIANT BERNARD & TRAVIS TOMKO (March 11, 2007; from Manabu Nakanishi & Takao Omori; Nagoya, Japan)

IWGP JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: KOJI KANEMOTO (May 3, 2006; from Tiger Mask IV; Fukuoka, Japan)

NWA WORLD CHAMPION: CHRISTIAN CAGE (January 15, 2007; from Abyss; Orlando, FL)

NWA WORLD TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: HOMICIDE & HERNANDEZ (October 22, 2006; from A.J. Styles & Christopher Daniels; Detroit, MI)

NWA SHOCKWAVE HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: HAVOK (January 13, 2007; from Paul E. Normous; Boonton, NJ)

OVW HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: PAUL BIRCHALL (December 15, 2006; from Chet the Jet; Louisville, KY)

OVW SOUTHERN TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: CODY RUNNELS & SHAWN SPEARS (December 13, 2006; from Deuce & Domino; Louisville, KY)

OVW TV CHAMPION: MIKE KRUEL

(February 7, 2007; from Boris Alexiev; Louisville, KY)

OVW WOMEN'S CHAMPION: KATIE LEA (November 1, 2006; from Beth Phoenix; Louisville, KY)

PRO WRESTLING GUERRILLA CHAMPION: EL GENERICO (February 24, 2007; from Human Tornado; Van Nuys, CA)

PRO WRESTLING GUERRILLA TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: VACANT (Most recently held by El Generico & Quicksilver)

PRO WRESTLING NOAH GLOBAL HONORED CROWN CHAMPION: MITSUHARU MISAWA (December 10, 2006; from Naomichi Marufuji; Tokyo, Japan)

PRO WRESTLING NOAH GLOBAL HONORED CROWN JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: TATSUHITO TAKAIWA (December 23, 2006; from Takashi Sugiura; Tokyo, Japan)

PRO WRESTLING NOAH GLOBAL HONORED CROWN TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: TAKESHI MORISHIMA & MOHAMMED YONE (December 2, 2006; from Takuma Sano & Yoshihiro Takayama in a tournament final; Tokyo, Japan)

RING OF HONOR CHAMPION: TAKESHI MORISHIMA (February 17, 2007; from Homicide; Philadelphia, PA)

RING OF HONOR TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: NARUKI DOI & SHINGO (March 3, 2007; from Jay & Mark Briscoe; Liverpool, England)

TNA X CHAMPION: CHRIS SABIN
(January 15, 2007; from Christopher Daniels in three-way match; Orlando, FL)

WWE CRUISERWEIGHT CHAMPION: CHAVO GUERRERO JR. (February 18, 2007; from Gregory Helms; Los Angeles, CA)

WWE INTERCONTINENTAL CHAMPION: UMAGA (February 19, 2007; from Jeff Hardy; Bakersfield, CA)

WWE RAW WORLD CHAMPION: JOHN CENA (September 17, 2006; from Edge; Toronto, Ontario)

WWE RAW WORLD TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: JOHN CENA & SHAWN MICHAELS (January 29, 2007; from Randy Orton & Edge; Dallas, TX)

WWE SMACKDOWN WORLD CHAMPION: BATISTA (November 26, 2006; from King Booker; Philadelphia, PA)

WWE SMACKDOWN WORLD TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: PAUL LONDON & BRIAN KENDRICK (May 21, 2006; from Joey Mercury & Johnny Nitro; Phoenix, AZ)

WWE U.S. CHAMPION: CHRIS BENOIT (October 10, 2006; from Ken Kennedy; Jacksonville, FL)

WWE WOMEN'S CHAMPION: MELINA (February 19, 2007; from Mickie James; Bakersfield, CA)



